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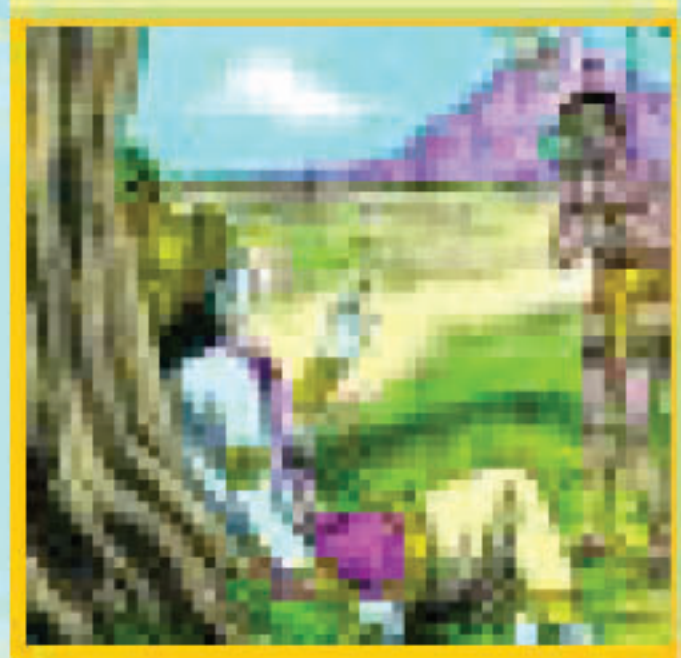
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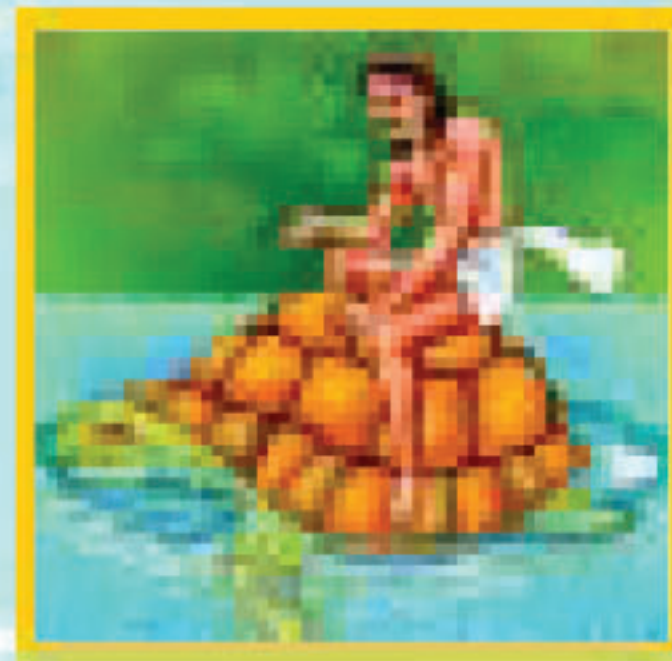
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 will appear in the next issue**

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B. Nagi Reddi and Chakrapani

Peace and goodwill

*T*he first year of the new millennium, which is nearing its concluding days, has been hearing the cries of war. What happened on a Black Tuesday in September in the USA and its sequel during the dark days of October in Afghanistan are only too well known. As we go to press, the world is gearing itself to face a possible threat of bio-terrorism from which, if it happens, many people may not escape.

Just as a tragedy in the family brings its members and friends together, the unexpected calamity of an unprecedented nature in certain regions of the world has brought many nations closer. The initial shock and anger in the minds of the world leaders are slowly giving way to a fear of possible escalation into a global conflagration and, naturally, a desire for annihilation of terrorism from the face of the earth so that people can live in peace and harmony.

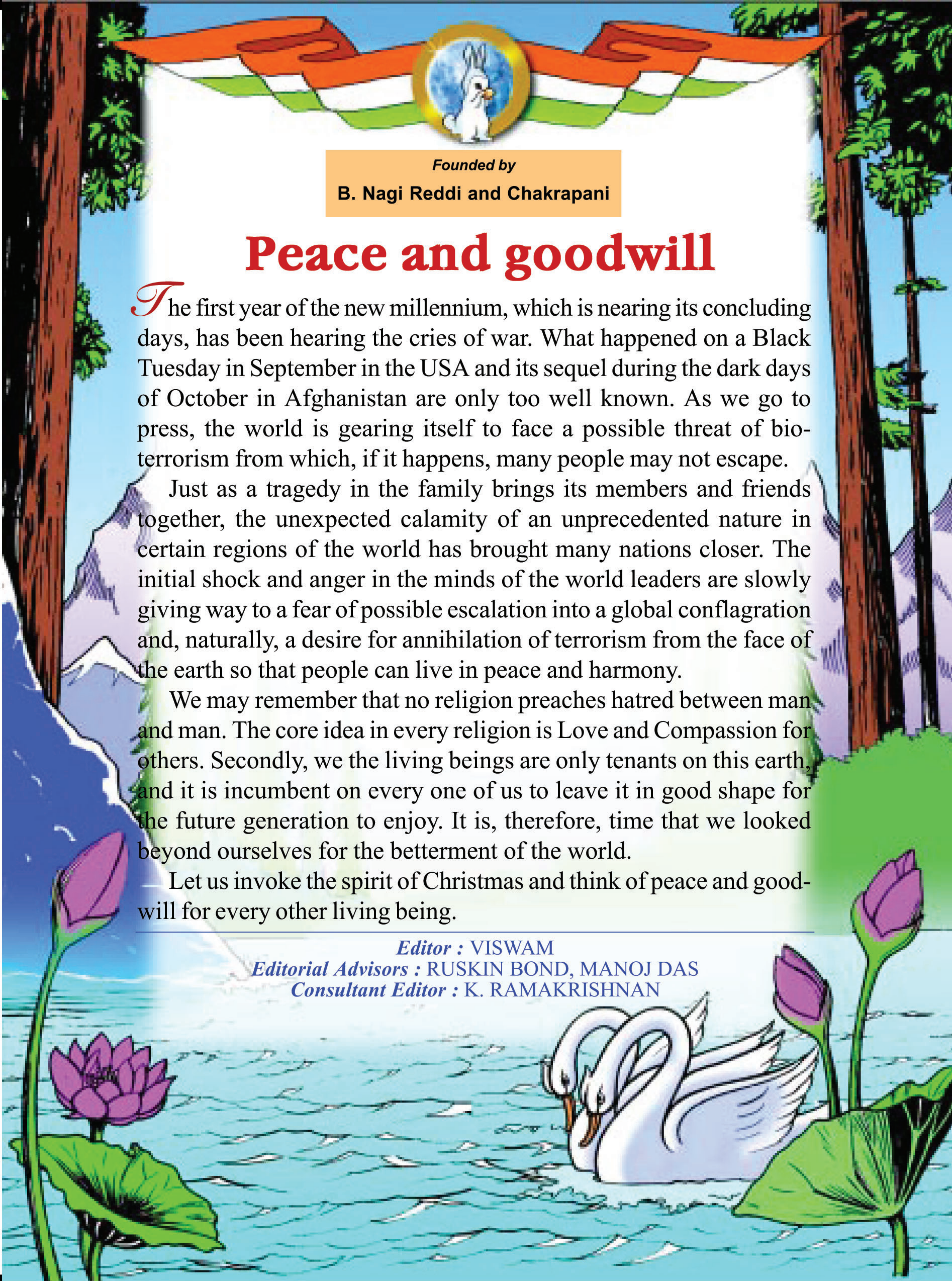
We may remember that no religion preaches hatred between man and man. The core idea in every religion is Love and Compassion for others. Secondly, we the living beings are only tenants on this earth, and it is incumbent on every one of us to leave it in good shape for the future generation to enjoy. It is, therefore, time that we looked beyond ourselves for the betterment of the world.

Let us invoke the spirit of Christmas and think of peace and goodwill for every other living being.

Editor : VISWAM

Editorial Advisors : RUSKIN BOND, MANOJ DAS

Consultant Editor : K. RAMAKRISHNAN



Enter the Heroes of India Quiz and win fabulous prizes

Heroes of India - 3

You love the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, don't you? Here is a quiz on our great heroes from the two epics.

Three
all correct entries
will receive bicycles
as awards.*



1 The son of the Sun god, this hero would even give his life for friends. He is also known for his benevolence. Who is he?

2 While still in his mother's womb, he learnt the art of breaking through a battle formation. He died gallantly fighting against a huge army inside such a formation. Do you know who he is?

3 This Vanara prince was sent to Lanka as Rama's messenger. Who is this hero?

4 This hero had been granted the boon that he could choose the time of his death. He lay wounded on a bed of arrows, waiting for an auspicious time to die. Who is he?

5 This great archer took the role of a dance teacher for one year when he and his brothers were living in disguise. You need no other clues to guess his name!

Fill in the blanks next to each question legibly. Which of these five is your favourite epic hero and why? Write 10 words on
My favourite epic hero is

.....

Name of participant:.....

.....Age:.....Class:.....

Address:.....

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Pin:.....Ph:.....

Signature of participant:.....

Signature of parent:.....

Please tear off the page and mail it to

Heroes of India Quiz-3

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On/before **January 5, 2002.**

Instructions

1. The contest is open to children in the age group 8-14 years.
2. *Three winners will be selected for this contest from entries in all the language editions. **Winners will receive bicycles of appropriate size.** If there are more than one all correct entries, winners will be selected on the basis of the best description of **My favourite hero.**
3. The judges' decision will be final.
4. No correspondence will be entertained in this regard.
5. The winners will be intimated by post.

***Prizes brought
to you by***



HAROLD, OUR HORNBILL

Harold's mother, like all good hornbills, was the most careful of wives; his father, the most easy-going of husbands. In January, before the flame-tree burst into scarlet blossom, Harold's father escorted his wife into a great hole high on the tree trunk, where his father and his father's father had taken their brides at the same time every year. In this weather-beaten hollow, generation upon generation of Great Indian Hornbills had been raised; and Harold's mother, like those before her, was enclosed within the hole by a sturdy wall of earth and sticks.

Harold's father left a small slit in the centre of this wall, to enable him to communicate with his wife whenever he felt like having a chat. Walled up in her apartment, Harold's mother was confined for over two months, when an egg was laid, and Harold was born.

In his naked boyhood, Harold was no beauty. His most prominent feature was his flaming red bill, matching the blossoms of the flame-tree which was now ablaze heralding the summer. He had a stomach that could never be filled, despite the best efforts of his parents who brought him pieces of jackfruit and berries from the banyan tree.

Chandamama

As he grew bigger, the room became more cramped and, one day, his mother burst through the wall, spread out her wings and sailed over the tree-tops. Her husband seemed glad to see her out and about, and frolicked with her in the trees, expressing his delight with deep gurgles and throaty chuckles. This was when Harold decided to tumble out of his nest and into a bed of marigolds far below.

Here he was at the mercy of our neighbour's cat, but before the cat could arrive, there was something large and red staring down at him --



my grandfather's sun-burnt face and short red beard. And in this way the young hornbill came to live with us on our front verandah.

Harold had a simple outlook on life, and once he had got over some early attacks of nerves, he began to welcome the approach of people. For him, Grandfather and I meant the arrival of food, and he greeted us with a craning neck, quivering open bill, and a loud, croaking "Ka-Ka-Kaee!" He was quite ready to accept us as his foster parents, provided we satisfied his enormous appetite.

I discovered that Harold would toy with anything bright or glittering, often swallowing it afterwards. On one occasion, he seized a one-rupee coin from me (a week's pocket-money in those days) and swallowed it neatly. I never saw the coin again, although I followed Harold about in the hope that my rupee would be ejected. He returned my marbles from time to time, but never coins!

Harold was not beautiful by Indian or international standards. He had a small body and a large head. But his nature was friendly, and he remained on good terms with my grand parents and most of the members of the household during his ten years with us.

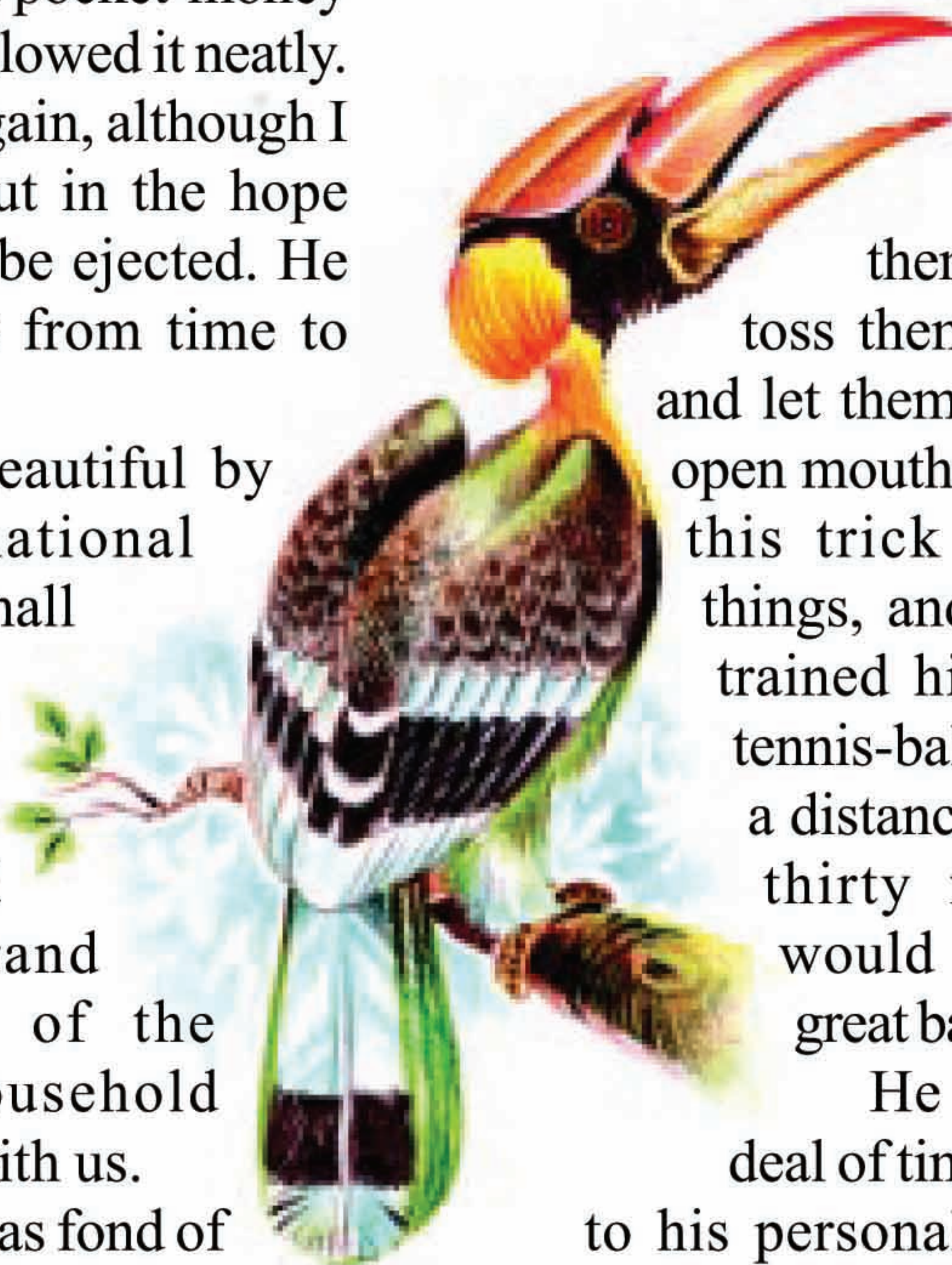
Although Harold was fond of

eating, he was quite willing to share his food with me, sometimes pushing delicacies into my mouth with his great beak. I did not mind sharing a banana with him -- he loved bananas! -- but I drew the line at accepting grasshoppers and beetles which he snapped up in the garden or on the verandah. Eating was a serious business with Harold, and if there was any delay at meal-times, he would summon us with raucous barks and vigorous bangs of his bill on the nearest door.

He loved eating balls of boiled rice, prepared specially for him by Grandmother. I would throw him the rice-

balls, and he would catch them in his beak, toss them into the air, and let them drop into his open mouth. He perfected this trick of catching things, and Grandfather trained him to catch a tennis-ball thrown from a distance of twenty to thirty feet. Harold would have made a great baseball catcher.

He gave a great deal of time and thought to his personal appearance.



When he was full grown, he carried a rouge-pot on his person, and used it very skilfully as an item of his morning

toilet. This rouge-pot was a small gland situated above the roots of his tail feathers; it produced a rich yellow fluid. Harold would dip into his pot from time to time and then rub the colour over his feathers and the back of his neck.

Only once did Harold misbehave. That was when he removed a lighted cigar from the mouth of an American cousin who was visiting us, and proceeded to swallow it. It was a moving experience for Harold and an unnerving one for our cousin. Both had to be restored with a dose of brandy.

Harold loved the rain. We always knew when it was going to rain because Harold would start chuckling to himself about an hour before the raindrops fell. This would annoy my aunts because they were always being caught in the rain. Harold would be chuckling when they left the house; and when they returned, drenched to the skin, he would be in fits of laughter.

When storm clouds gathered, and gusts of wind shook the banana trees, Harold would get very excited. His chuckle would change to an eerie whistle. "Wheee... wheee!" he would

scream. And then, as the first drops of rain hit the verandah steps, and the scent of freshened earth wafted through the rooms, he would start roaring again, like a football fan. The wind swept the rain into the verandah, and Harold would spread out his wings and dance, tumbling about like a circus clown.



Once the monsoon had set in, he would get used to the rains and be less demonstrative. But the first showers were always a joy and wonder to him, and we would all come out on the verandah to watch him dance.

I miss Harold's raucous bark and the banging of his great bill. If there is a heaven for good hornbills, I hope he is getting all the summer showers he could want, and plenty of tennis balls to catch.



Truly a work of art!

*K*ing Abhijit of Kosala was a great patron of arts. One day, two famous painters, Puneet and Sidhesh, went to him. “Please test our skills and tell us which one of us is the better artist,” they requested the king.

The king was in a fix. He was familiar with their work. But to pass judgement on their effort was quite difficult. The king pondered for a while. “I’m giving you two houses that look alike and are next to each other. Use your talent and give them a facelift,” he told them. “Whatever you need will be given to you.”

“I’ll need a hundred colours, your majesty,” said Puneet.

Sidhesh said he would not need any colours, much to the surprise of the king.

When Puneet completed his assignment, he invited the king to see his work. He was confident he would

be declared a better artist than Sidhesh.

King Abhijit was highly impressed by the way Puneet had painted his house. “Puneet, you’re indeed a wonderful artist!” the king exclaimed.

Next he went to Sidhesh. As he approached his house, the king stopped in his tracks. A thousand shades and hues brightly lit up the walls and the surrounding area. Sidhesh had achieved this effect even without using a single colour.

The king was lost for words. “How did you do this?” he asked.

“I just scrubbed the walls of the house until they were a sparkling clean, your majesty,” replied Sidhesh humbly.

Like the pure heart of a child that reflects the goodness surrounding it, Sidhesh’s clean walls reflected the brilliant hues on Puneet’s house!



Kaminik

*F*ar, far away to the North is the ice-covered country of Greenland. The Eskimo mothers there gather their children around the warm fire in their igloos and often tell them this story about a little boy called Kaminik.

The village of Norssit in Greenland is found high up on the side of the mountain. However, many years ago, it was right down by the sea. Now, you may wonder how a village by the sea could shift itself high on to the side of a mountain. When I first heard the story, I too wondered.

‘How did that happen?’ I thought to myself. ‘Villages don’t walk up mountain sides.’

What do you think would have happened?

Did a volcano push it up? Did a wave and a huge fish throw it up? But,

then, if that were so, it would not have nestled so neatly into the mountainside.

Well, let me tell you exactly what happened.

When the village was a village by the sea, there lived a fisherman and his wife. They had a cute son called Kaminik. However, there was one problem. Kaminik did not grow at all after he was three years old. As the years passed, other children in the village grew tall and strong, and started helping the grown ups in all their chores, but Kaminik remained small and weak and could not really do much at all.

As he was so small, he spent all his time trying to avoid big and noisy things that frightened him a lot, like the husky dogs that drew the villagers’ sledges over the ice and the snow.

When he did come out into the village, the children would taunt him.

"Poor Little Kaminik," they sang.

"You look weak and so sick,

You can't do what we can,

Can you? Can you?

You stay very small

While we are so tall."

Kaminik would get very upset and



run to his mother when the children chanted the song. His mother wiped his tears and told him that he would also grow when his time came. But time passed and nothing changed. Finally, Kaminik could not bear it any more. He decided to leave Norssit and go out into the world. He thought he would find a part of the world where things were his size. His mother made

a kayak for him out of sealskin, packed some food, and sadly waved good-bye to him.

He paddled through the cold waters until he had left the shore and his village behind in the mist. Now as his little boat went ahead, the sea got colder and colder and he had to work his way through huge icebergs that loomed frighteningly over him. On one of those icebergs he saw a huge seagull, about three or four times larger than him. He had never ever seen such a huge gull before.

‘Where have I come? Things seem larger and more scary than at home in Norssit,’ worried Kaminik.

Just then, in front of him, he saw an island. ‘I will rest here, and after I get up I shall worry about what to do,’ he decided. But before he could get to the island, it began to move. Then in front of Kaminik’s amazed eyes, first a huge head and after that an enormous body rose up from the middle of that island. It was a giant called Akitinek! The giant stretched and yawned and when he moved, he caused huge waves in the sea and Kaminik cried out in fear as his kayak almost got overturned.

The giant heard his cry and looked at the sea near his feet. “Ah, what is this?” he said as he scooped up Kaminik and his kayak gently. “Well I never! It’s a little man. I shall take you home to my wife,” he declared.

And walked back to the shore and then strode over the mountains to his home, gently carrying Kaminik in his kayak in the palm of his hand.

“Look, a present from the sea,” he told his wife, as he set Kaminik in his kayak on the table when he got home.

Kaminik looked fearfully at the giantess who was Akitinek’s wife. But Kaminik saw that though she was huge, she had a very kind face and he was suddenly no longer afraid.

“He’s so very sweet,” exclaimed the giantess. “We shall bring him up as our son. What do you say?”

“I think that’s just fine,” said Akitinek. “What do *you* think, little man?”

But Kaminik said nothing. He was so relieved and so tired that he just fell asleep in his kayak.

So a new life started for Kaminik. He was very happy with the giants who looked after him well and were always very gentle with him. No one teased him for being small. The giants and their

friends thought, being small was kind of cute. Sometimes Kaminik did get scared, because everything was so big in this land of giants. Flies seemed like birds, and spiders were as large as dogs. But soon Kaminik got used to them. After some time he noticed something quite funny. Things did not look so big anymore. Indeed, they seemed quite small. Even Akitinek and his wife seemed to be growing smaller. And Akitinek said to Kaminik, “Well, son, you seem to be growing at last.”

And indeed his time had come and grow he did by leaps and bounds. Soon he was as tall as Akitinek and as strong. He could catch large seals from the sea with his bare hands. Once he even wrestled with a polar bear. The giants watched all this with great pride.

One day, Kaminik told his foster parents that he would like to visit Norssit and see his real parents. The giants agreed. They built him a huge kayak for, of course, his old one was



of no use to him now, and filled it with food. Then they made a paddle as long as a fir tree with blades as wide as a house. Then Akitinek's wife told him: "Be sure to come back, son. We love you so much. Besides you're so big you may not be comfortable with ordinary people." She also gave him many gifts for his parents and sent him off.

Kaminik promised to come back. "I'm happy here. I just want to surprise those people a bit," he said.

This time the journey took Kaminik only half a day. He arrived at Norssit just as the fishing boats came back from the sea. He could see his father unloading the fish and his mother waiting for him at the door of their house. Kaminik stood up in his Kayak and shouted out a greeting to them. The whole village stopped whatever they were doing and stared at this giant who had suddenly popped out of the sea.

You can imagine how amazed they were.

"Don't you remember me?" asked Kaminik, and sang the song that used

to hurt him so much. He laughed to see the surprise on everyone's face. He laughed and laughed till the noise sent the huskies scampering for cover. Then he got off the kayak and waded to the shore. He told his parents all that had happened and gave them the gifts he had brought. That night the whole village feasted and made merry in honour of Kaminik's visit.

In the morning he bade farewell to them all and then did something very odd. He lifted up all the houses and everything in the village and placed them snugly up the mountainside.

"Why are you doing this?" the villagers asked him in alarm.

"Don't worry. You'll be safe when I launch my kayak. Otherwise the waves will cover the village. You'll also be safe from the storms that blow up in the sea."

Then Kaminik launched his kayak and it was as he said. The water rose up and covered the place where the village had been.

That is how Norssit, the village by the sea, got up onto the mountainside.

-Uma Raman



A Hodja story

Whose word to believe?

One day, Hodja Naseeruddin was sitting in front of his house and watching the world go by.

Many friends greeted him as they walked past. The Hodja politely returned their greetings.

After a while, a young man, whom the Hodja knew slightly, came up to him. "Hodja," he said, after greeting him politely, "I find I have to go and see my uncle today rather urgently. He lives not too far away. It'll take me a few hours to ride there on a donkey, and I should be back by nightfall. Do you think you can spare your donkey, since you do not seem to be going anywhere today? I'll be very careful and will certainly come back before dark."

Now the Hodja was very much attached to his donkey and rode it everywhere. He certainly did not want to lend it to a very likely irresponsible



young man. Heaven only knew where he would actually go and what he would do. However, he did not want to refuse rudely.

"Oh, unfortunately the donkey is not here. My wife has gone to visit her sister and is not likely to be back until tomorrow. Why don't you try your luck with someone else?" he suggested.

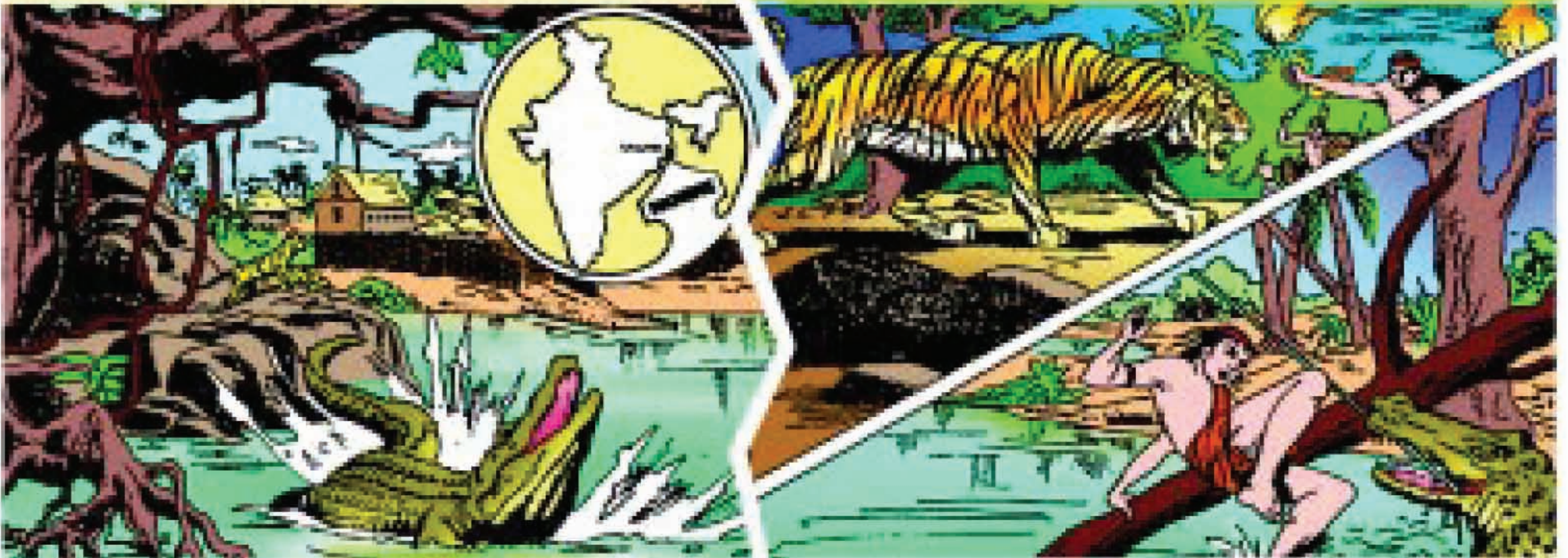
So the young man turned to leave. Just then the Hodja's donkey could be heard braying from the backyard.

The young man stopped and said reproachfully: "I thought you said your donkey wasn't here."

"I did," said the Hodja. "Young man, the world will laugh at you if you start believing a donkey rather than a man."

The Sunderbans of Bengal, some two hundred years ago, was covered with dense forest.

The Santhals considered themselves the children of this forest. They were brave, too, and nonchalantly faced dangers.



The tribals paid rent to the landlords whose lands they tilled. The East India Company demanded a tax of Rs. 40,000 every year.

Harassment and torture continued. The year was 1855. The Santhals rose in revolt.



The Company's soldiers wanted to attack the Santhal hamlets.

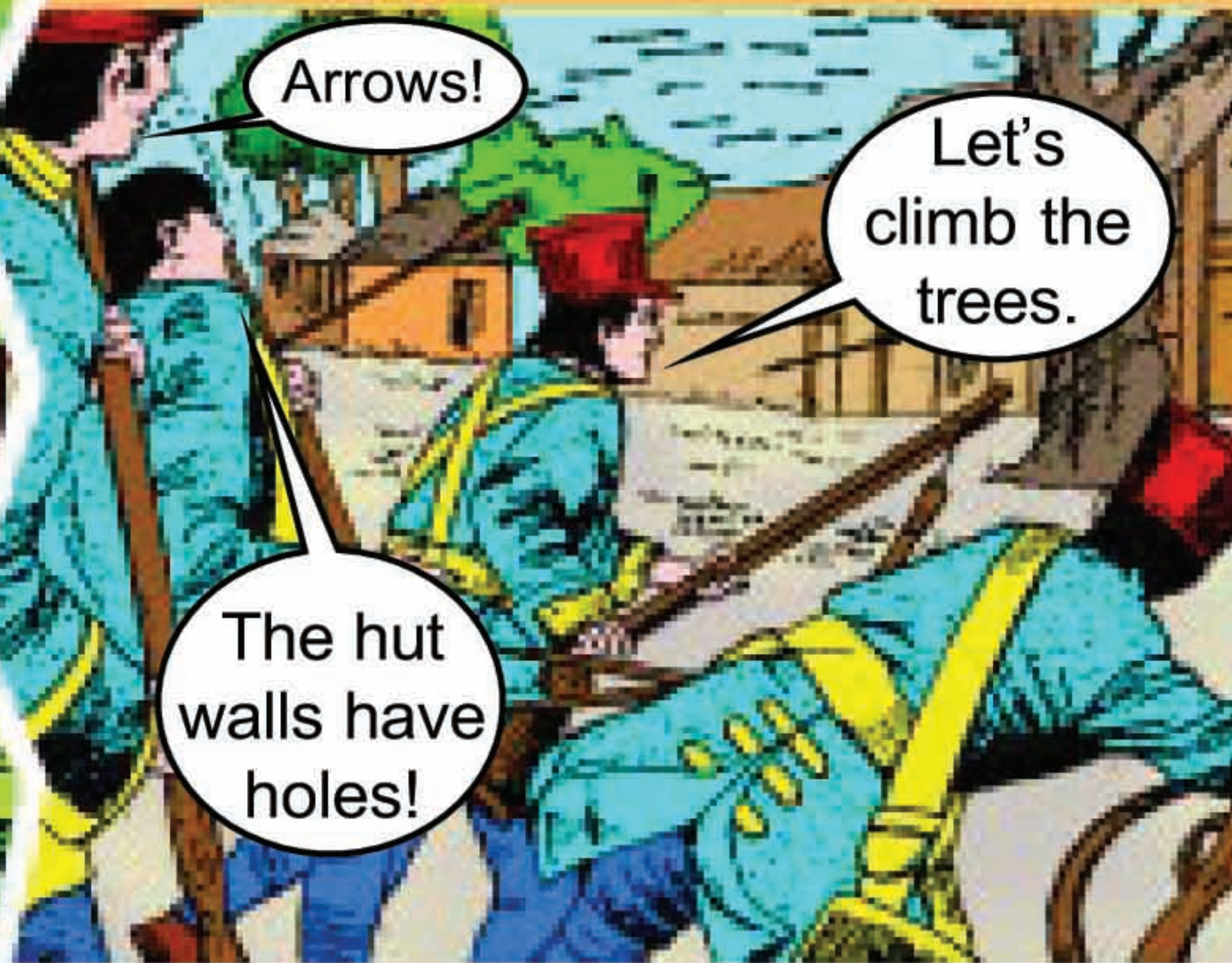
The Company's men thought up a novel strategy. They let elephants get intoxicated and drove them to the Santhal habitations. Women and children were trampled upon.



The tribals had only bows and arrows with them. Nevertheless they fought bravely. They thought the English soldiers were retreating.

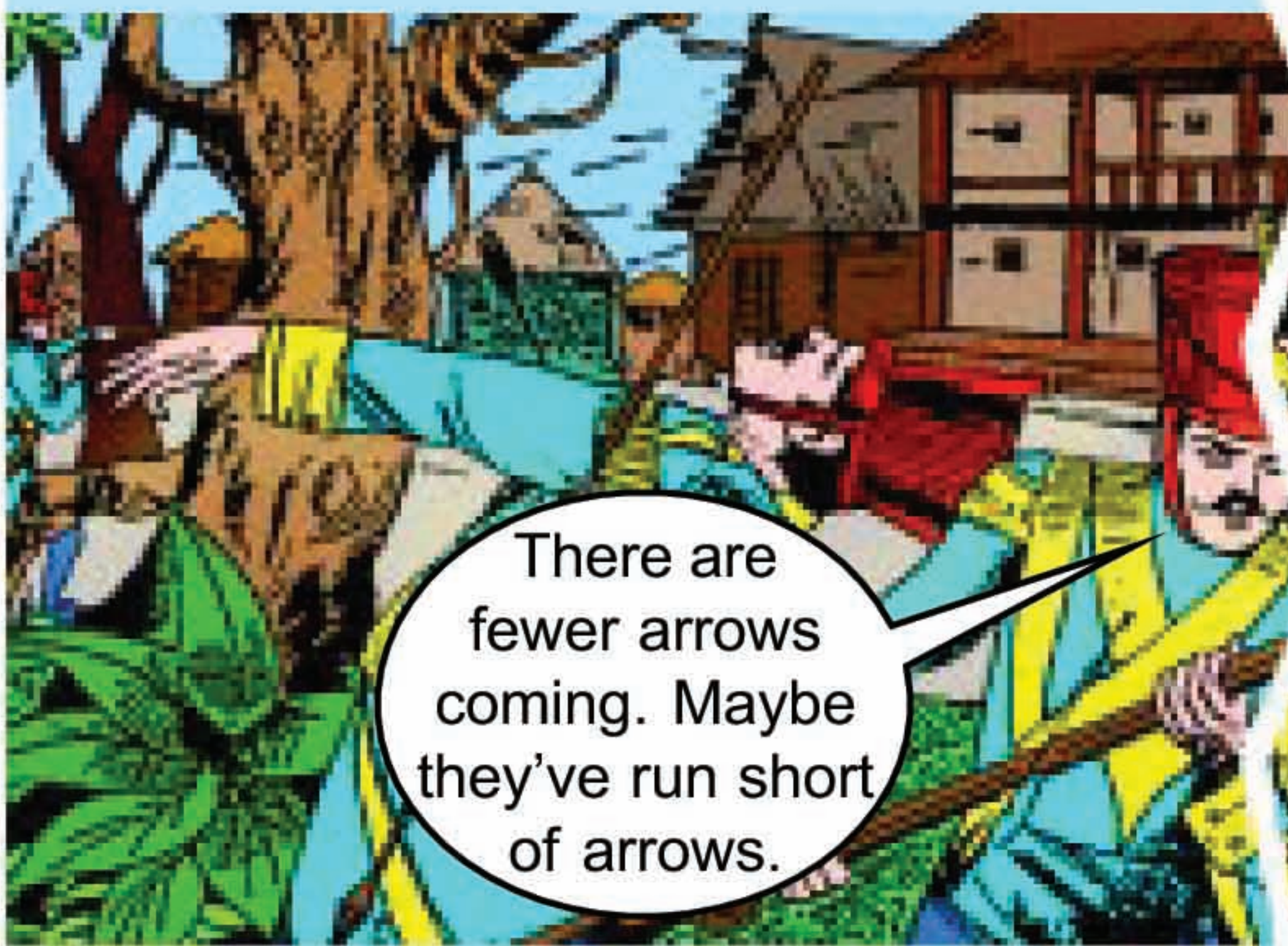


The English soldiers swooped down on the stronghold of the tribals. A shower of arrows greeted them.



The soldiers climbed the trees and began firing at the huts. The response came in the shape of arrows, which killed some soldiers.

The soldiers charged at the huts. A lone arrow came from one of the huts.



The soldiers broke open the door. Several tribesmen lay dead. One solitary tribal still had his finger on the arrow.

The soldiers rushed in to capture the archer. He flashed a sword and fought valiantly till he fell dead. The Santhal revolt was a heroic chapter in India's fight for freedom.



Konark, in Orissa, houses one of the most awe-inspiring temples dedicated to the Sun god. Built in the 13th century, it is considered an architectural marvel. In fact, the town Konark has been named after this beautiful temple – ‘*Kon+ark*’ means ‘the corner of the Sun.’

One of the temple’s outstanding features is its shape – it has been constructed in the shape of the huge chariot of *Surya*. The twelve pairs of wheels and seven life-like horses that draw the chariot complete the amazing picture. The wheels represent the 12 months of the year, and the horses, the seven days of the week. As the temple

overlooks the waters of the Bay of Bengal, it catches and reflects the rays of the sun in different angles and moods.

This temple is also known as the Black Pagoda. The main spire of the temple, which was about 70m high, has collapsed, but the dance hall and the audience hall remain undamaged. The whole temple has beautiful carvings and sculptures. It is one of the many monuments in India to be recognised as a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO.

The Sun Temple Museum, which has a good collection of sculptures from the temple ruins, is another attraction in Konark.

A QUIZ FOR YOU!

For children up to 14 years

CONTEST - IV

1. Some distance from the Sun Temple is a famous temple built at the confluence of the river Kushabhadra and the sea. Which?

2. Name the beach in Orissa, which was once a seaport.

3. Which dam in Orissa forms the largest artificial lake in Asia?

Write your answers legibly in the blank space provided, fill in the coupon below and send the entry to

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A colorful illustration depicting a scene from a story. On the left, a large, gnarled tree with thick, twisted branches dominates the upper half of the frame. Several human skulls are visible on the tree's trunk and branches. A black owl is perched on one of the lower branches. In the center, a man with dark hair and a mustache, wearing a red tunic with gold trim and a white shawl draped over his shoulders, stands looking back over his right shoulder. He holds a long, curved sword in his right hand. Behind him, a woman in a red sari with a gold border is walking away. The ground is a mix of green grass and patches of brown earth, scattered with several human skulls and bones. In the bottom left corner, a large, dark, coiled snake is visible. The background is a dark, stormy sky with a bright, jagged lightning bolt striking down on the right side. A bat is seen flying in the upper right corner. The overall mood is dark and mysterious.

New tales of
King Vikram
and the Vetala

The Hermit's Riddles

*L*ightning streaked the skies and the roar of the thunder echoed in the dark night. Rain poured down in torrents. It was a night the ghosts and spirits did not want to miss. Their weird laughter could be heard echoing eerily. Bones and skulls lay strewn around and occasionally the clanging of chains rent the air. But King Vikramaditya walked on resolutely. He was determined to keep his word to



the mendicant, and so once again he went back in the darkness and rain to the ancient tree where the Vetala had perched himself in the corpse. The king climbed the tree, shouldered the corpse, and made his way across the desolate cremation ground when once again the Vetala spoke.

“O King!” he said. “Why do you persist in this futile exercise? You know that you will not succeed. Has someone asked you to perform this terrible task? Is it any strange recluse or hermit who speaks, not plainly, but in riddles? It is very difficult to make out what these people have in their minds. To illustrate my point, I’ll tell you a story to while

away the time pleasantly on this lonely walk and maybe you’ll also learn something from it.”

And so the Vetala started on another story:

Once upon a time, there was a king called Martand Dev. He was a wise and good ruler. He needed a new counsellor. He wondered for a long time whom he should appoint. He wanted to choose a wise and clever person who would consider all the facts carefully before he made a decision. Finally, he thought that Manibhadra, an intelligent and smart nobleman of his court, would be a good choice. But before he could make the appointment, the queen put forward the claim of another nobleman called Vishwabandhu. He also happened to be her uncle.

“My uncle Vishwabandhu is not in anyway less clever or accomplished than Manibhadra. Besides, he is much senior and more experienced. I think he’ll make a very good adviser. Why don’t you give him the post?” pleaded the queen.

“I don’t mind if he is really as able as you say, but we must find an opportunity to test them both before we make up our mind,” was the king’s answer.

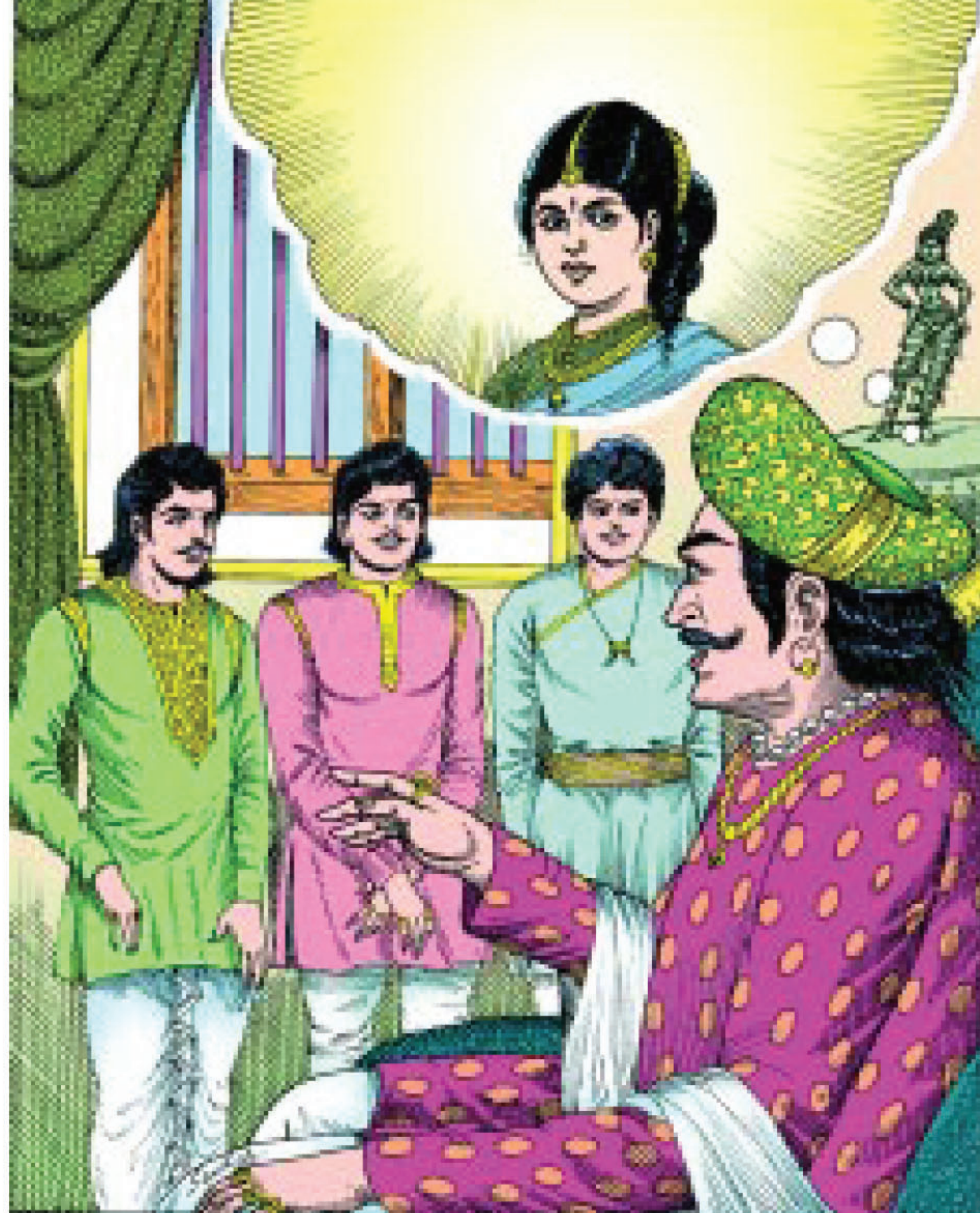
The chance to do just this rose soon after that. There was a rich merchant in the kingdom. He had a very lovely daughter. She had three suitors. All of them were young men who seemed eligible in every way. The merchant did not know who would be the most suitable for his daughter and could not make up his mind. So he sent the three men to a hermit he knew and had tremendous faith in, who lived by himself in the hills.

The holy man looked at the three men carefully for a while without uttering a word. Then, still without speaking anything, he handed over a shell full of earth to one of them, another shell full of water to the second young man, and yet another shell full of grains to the third one.

Now the merchant could not understand what the sage meant by this. He thought the riddle needed a smarter brain than his and so took the three young men to the king's court and sought help in understanding the meaning of the hermit's action.

The king asked the three men what they thought of the holy man's action.

"Your majesty," said the first suitor, "I was given a shell full of earth. Without earth neither water nor grain is of any use. So, I think the sage has



indicated that I'm the most suitable to wed the merchant's daughter."

The second one said, "Well, I feel that earth and grain are of no use without water. All life depends on water. So I think that by giving me the most precious thing, the sage has chosen me."

The third one had a totally different perspective. He said, "Water and earth are only conditions for the grains to grow. What's important is the crop and everything works towards producing that. I was given the grains and so I think the sage's choice is obvious."

Now the king was himself in a dilemma. He thought that all the three



suitors sounded convincing. Now he had an idea: this would be the right opportunity to test the wisdom and resourcefulness of the two candidates for the post of the king's counsellor. Fortunately, both Manibhadra and Vishwabandhu were present in the court at that time.

The king turned to Vishwabandhu. "What's your opinion?"

"Well, I think water is the most important and significant of the three. It makes both earth and grains purposeful. Without water neither of them is of any use," said Vishwabandhu.

"What do *you* think?" the king asked Manibhadra next.

"Your majesty, I must look at the things more closely before I give my opinion," said Manibhadra. He then tasted the water, smelt the earth, and ran his fingers through the grains.

Then he said: "Your majesty, the sage's choice is the suitor who was given the earth."

But this did not solve the king's problem. Which of them was right? At the king's request the hermit presented himself in the court the next day. He smiled serenely and said: "True gems are rare. O King! You have one in your court. Recognise it, for your own good and for the good of your kingdom!"

King Marthand Dev looked at him. He understood. He smiled back and named his counsellor immediately.

The Vetala finished his story there and then turned to King Vikramaditya. "O King! The hermit always seemed to be speaking in riddles! Whom did the king choose as his counsellor and why? What did he make of the final riddle posed to him by the hermit? If you know the answer and still refuse to spell it out, your head will explode into smithereens. Therefore, O King, think carefully and give me your answer."

King Vikramaditya spoke at once. He said: "King Marthand Dev was himself a wise man. When he was first

posed with the riddle of the hermit's choice of suitor, he was confused by the convincing answers of the three young men. But being resourceful, he turned the issue to his advantage and invited the two candidates for the post of counsellor to solve the riddle. When he could not decide which of them was correct, he sent for the hermit himself.

“He was confident that the hermit, who had obviously chosen the right suitor for the merchant's daughter, would also choose the right man to be his counsellor. The hermit, true to his nature, spoke in riddles again. But this time the king was ready for him. He understood that when he spoke of true gems, he meant only Manibhadra, whose name meant ‘a good gem’. He, therefore, appointed Manibhadra immediately.

“Everyone present in the court had seen the young men and looked at the

three shells they carried. But none of them examined the contents carefully except Manibhadra. On the face of it, the three things, earth, water and grain, seemed of equal importance, just as the three young men seemed equally good suitors, but when he examined each element carefully, he would have found that there was something wrong with the water and the grain. The water was probably saline or contaminated in some way, while the grain had some chaff.

“On the other hand, the earth must have been clean and sweet smelling. Using that as evidence, Manibhadra made his remarks with confidence. And he was rightly made the king's counsellor.”

King Vikram was absolutely right as usual, but the Vetala, without another word, flew away with the corpse to the ancient tree. King Vikram drew his sword and went after the Vetala.



Christmas

Christians celebrate the festival in line with the customs and traditions in their respective regions.

Every house is decorated with lights. A Christmas tree decked with stars, balloons, and colourful festoons is put on display in homes and shopping centres. Some families decorate cribs and display scenes of the birth of Christ with dolls.

A big, gaily-coloured star is hung in front of each house. In villages and small towns, contests are held to determine which of these stars occupies the highest position. In the southern parts of India, people make lamp shades out of split bamboos and place bulbs in it. These are hung at the threshold of the houses.

On the eve of Christmas, carol singers go round the houses in every parish, singing carols.

Before Christmas actually arrives, midnight or early morning masses are held in all the churches. After the mass, people visit friends and relatives, distributing gifts. A family get-together and a grand festive lunch complete the celebration.

Christmas celebrations are incomplete without the delicious Christmas cake. Traditionally, the cake is baked at home with lots of fruits and laced with home-brewed wine.



Come December and the air is filled with the melodious tune of 'Jingle bells...'. Santa Claus, gifts, reindeer, sleighs and cakes are some of the things that we are reminded of when we think of Christmas.

All over the world, December 25 is a very special day. It is Christmas, the birthday of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity.

Christmas is a festival of goodwill. It is a time for joy and gaiety. In India, all

Craft a Christmas tree

Halleluiah! Here comes the holiest and happiest day of the year. It's time again for festive celebrations, wholehearted giving and jolly get-togethers! This Christmas, decorate your houses with a cute tree crafted by your wee hands. All you have to do is, pull out a pair of scissors and a gum bottle. Remember to read the instructions carefully.

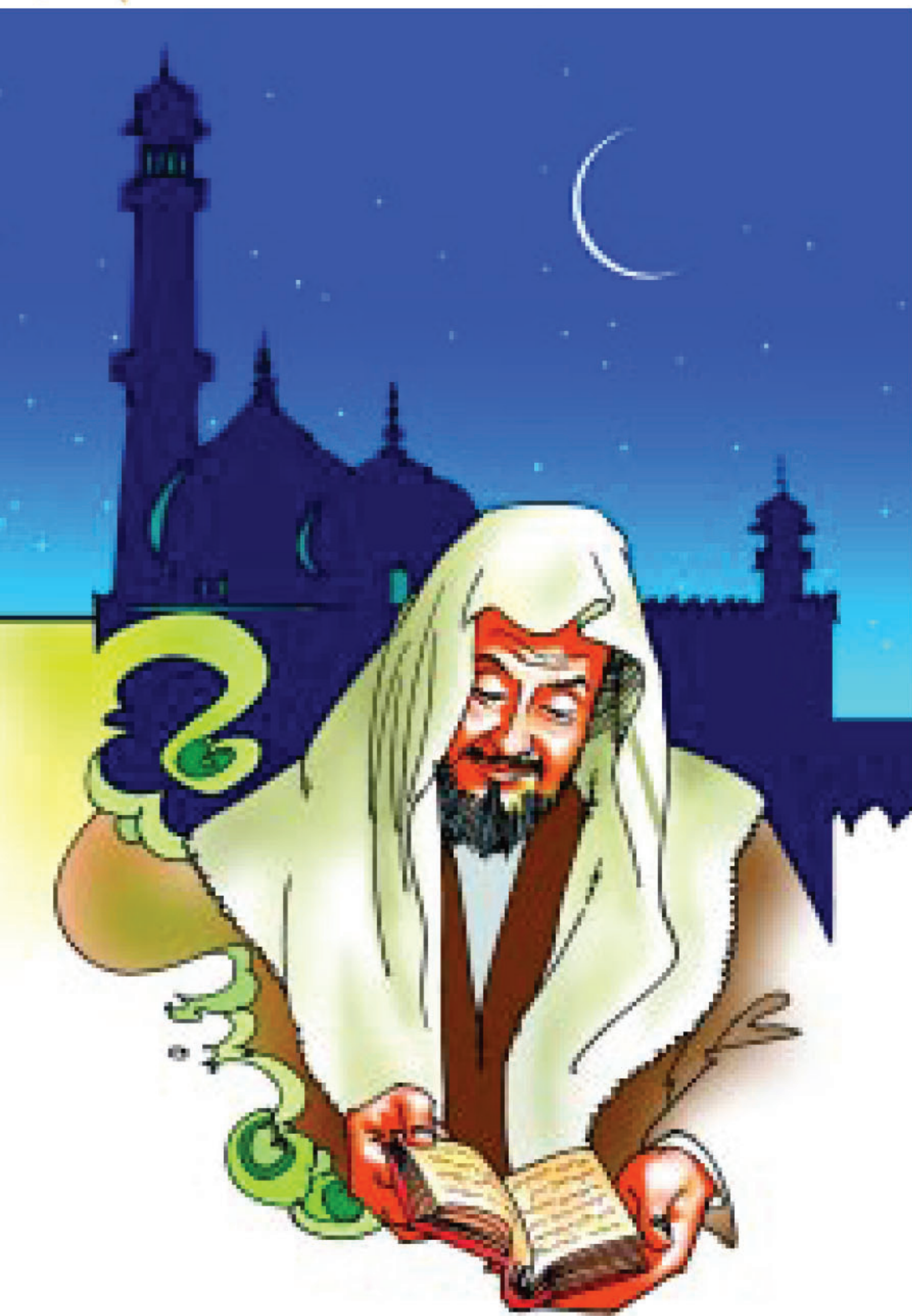
1. Paste this page on a cardboard and cut out all the figures separately.
2. Make a slit in the tree A at the bottom as shown and in tree B at the top.
3. Insert the cutout of tree A into the cutout of tree B.
4. Fix the star to the top of the tree.
5. Put the candy sticks and colour balls on the tree as you wish. Use gum to stick them on.

Great! That's one colourful Christmas tree, isn't it? Now, go ahead and proudly put it on display in your showcase.





Id-ul-Fitr



Id Mubarak - these words are the most commonly heard greetings on the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr. The Ramzan Id is said to be the most colourful of all Muslim festivals. This comes at the end of the Muslim month of *Ramadan*. Id is celebrated the day after the New Moon in this holy month of *Ramadan*. This year Id-ul-Fitr falls on December 17.

During this month, Muslims fast

throughout the day. They eat before sunrise and break the fast only after sunset and the sighting of the moon. They do not consume anything, not even water, in the daytime.

On the day of Id, friends and relatives greet each other. The whole community prays together. As the prayer congregation is usually huge, the prayer is held in open grounds.

The Kazi, a religious leader, is led in a procession to the place of worship. After the prayers, he gives a sermon. Feasting and visiting friends and relatives are some of the activities of the day.

On the occasion of Id, all Muslims give alms to the poor. The *Fitr* or the alms usually consists of wheat or any other grain, dates or grapes. Every Muslim must give alms before attending the prayer session.

The Shia sect of Muslims observes the twenty-first and twenty-second day of the Ramadan month in mourning. They mourn the martyrdom of Ali, Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law.

The Holy Koran is believed to have descended from heaven during this month. It is said that the Koran was disclosed on the odd nights of the last ten nights of this holy month. These days are observed as *Lailut-ul-Kadr*, 'the nights of power.' It is also believed that only Allah and the Prophet knew the exact date and time of the revelation of the Holy Koran.

Kartikai

Kartikai is a 'festival of lights' celebrated in Tamil Nadu. It occurs in the Tamil month of *Kartikai*, which is known as *Kartik* in north India. The festival this year falls on November 30. It is celebrated for three days.

The festival is celebrated in honour of Lord Siva who is believed to have manifested himself as all the five essential elements of life at five places in Tamil Nadu.

At the temple of Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai, he represents one of these five essential elements of life – Fire. In the month of *Kartikai*, on the day dedicated to the star *Bharani*, a lamp is lit on the hillock in the temple town.

The festival is also said to mark the end of the rainy season.

Starting from the first day of the month, women light small earthen lamps and place them on the threshold. And on the day of the great festival at Tiruvannamalai, when the great lamp is lit on the mountain peak, there is a



special puja in every Tamil home. Rows of small earthen lamps are lit and placed all over the house and on the threshold.

In every household, the morning of the festival is marked by making small lamps out of rice flour, jaggery, and ghee. These lamps are lit at the family altar. Hymns are sung in praise of Lord Siva and the traditional puja is done. Children burst crackers that are left over from the Diwali celebrations.



The rewards for kindness

Long ago, in the tiny village of Khedgaon in Maharashtra, lived a little boy named Sandeep. He was a gentle boy, whom everybody loved, except his father. “What’s the use of looking after you, you blind boy?” his father scolded him. “What work can you do? It would be better if you go out into the world and beg for your own food,” he said one day, sending the poor little boy away.

So Sandeep set out to find his way

in this big, alien world. He had only Moti, his faithful dog, for company. They made a comfortable pair together, the young blind boy and a frisky loving puppy. Five long years went by. They had come far away from their house, making a living by singing on the roads for money and food.

One evening, after a long day out in the hot sun, Sandeep and Moti lay down on the steps of the temple, too tired even to eat the food they had managed to collect. “Oh Moti, let’s rest awhile before we eat. I am so tired of living this way. How I wish I could see. Life would be so different then,” mourned Sandeep. Moti, sensing her master’s sadness, licked his face sympathetically.

Soon Sandeep was asleep, his arm firmly around his beloved Moti.

In his sleep, Sandeep had a strange dream. A beautiful fairy came up to him and said, “Sandeep, Sandeep! Can you see me?” The little boy sighed aloud even in his sleep and mumbled, “Alas, that is what I cannot do, little fairy. You see, I’m blind.”

The fairy gave him a sweet smile and said, “Don’t be sad, Sandeep. Let me try to help you. Every time you do a good deed, a little light will come into your eyes and



you will be able to see a little. But remember, every time you do something bad, the light will go out and you will be blinder than you were before.”

So saying, the fairy disappeared and Sandeep suddenly woke up with a start. He had an unusual feeling of well-being and he was pleased to see that Moti too looked happier than ever. “Come on, Moti, let’s eat. Tomorrow is another day and I can’t wait to get started!”

The next morning dawned bright and sunny and Sandeep felt it was beckoning him. Remembering the words of the fairy in his dream, the little boy allowed his heart to soar on the wings of hope. ‘I may yet see the world and all the beautiful things in it!’ he thought excitedly. They set out jauntily. On the way, they came across a blind beggar sitting on the roadside. He was very old. “Give this poor blind man some money,” he called out.

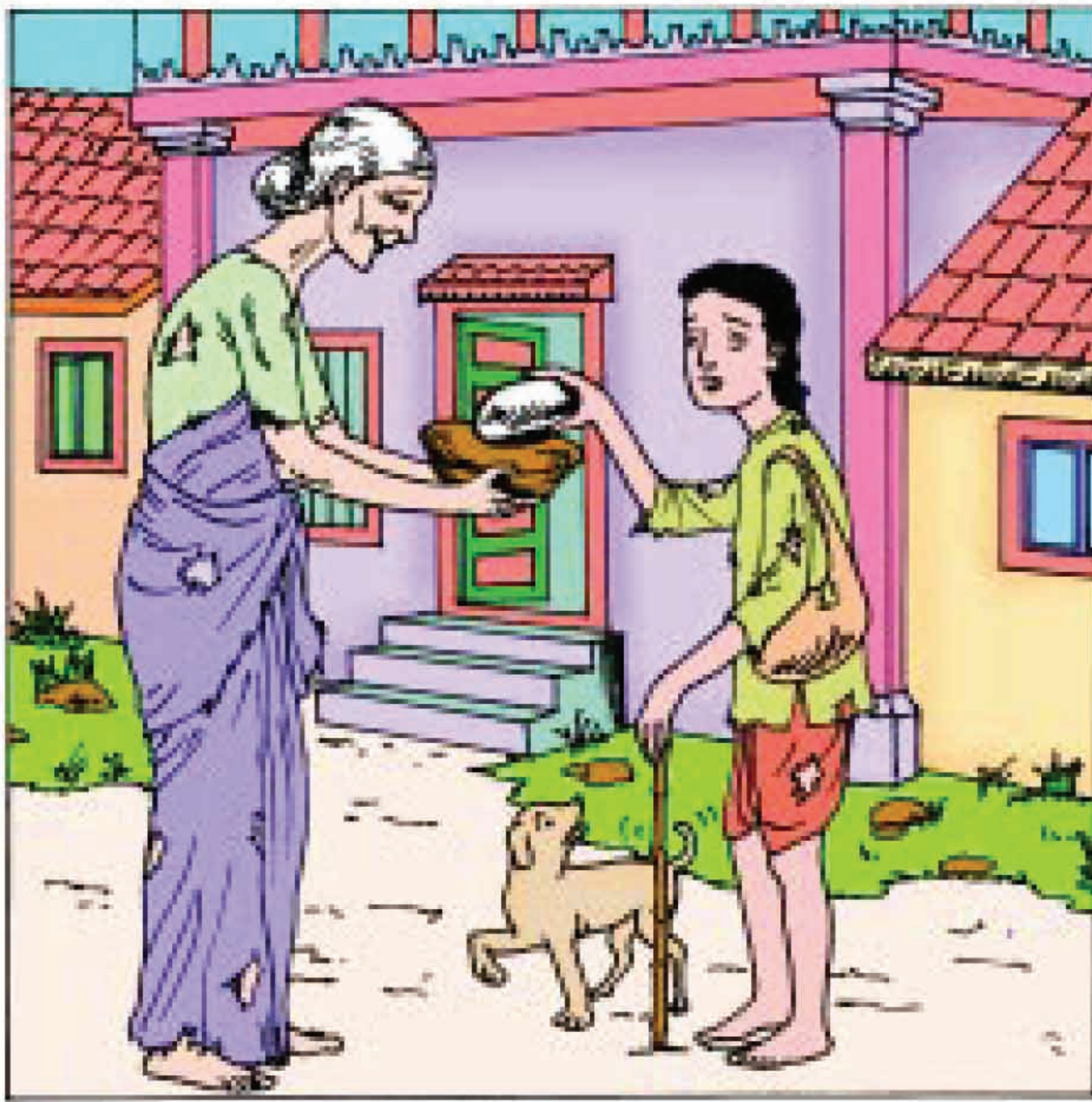
“I too am poor and I too am blind,” answered Sandeep with sympathy.

“But at least you are not lame as well, young one,” the beggar replied. Hearing this, Sandeep immediately took out the single rupee he had in his pocket and gave it to the old man. The old man thanked him in a quavering voice. Suddenly there was a bright flash of light



in Sandeep’s eyes and he gasped in surprise. He quickly closed his eyes and when he opened them again he felt that the darkness was not as dark as it used to be! “Oh! Moti, the dream was really true! I did a good deed now and I have become a little less blind!” Sandeep shouted jubilantly. Moti ran around him, barking excitedly.

That night, the twosome met an old beggar woman who asked for something to eat. Without hesitating, Sandeep handed her the dried piece of bread he had been saving for their own dinner. She took it and thanked him with tears in her eyes. Again a sudden brightness flashed in Sandeep’s eyes and his face lit up with joy. “Is the moon shining tonight?” he asked the old woman. He laughed happily when she told him that it was a full moon night. “I



can almost see it,” he whispered to himself.

Boy and dog were very hungry when they woke up the next morning, not having eaten anything the night before. “Come Moti, we may find some food...if we’re lucky,” Sandeep called out and they set out down the dusty road. Suddenly a hen came squawking and Moti was after it in a jiffy. A few minutes later she came back, with the hen in her mouth! Sandeep was very pleased. This was good luck indeed. “Moti, I can sell this hen in the market and with that money we can buy ourselves some food. Come along!” They hurried to the market where they sold the hen immediately for a good price.

Sandeep and Moti were celebrating when, suddenly, Sandeep felt a dark

cloud come over his eyes. He was blinder than ever before! “Oh no! Moti, all the light has gone from my eyes. It was wrong of us to have sold that hen because it was not ours at all...come, let us go and make amends,” Sandeep said sorrowfully. They went back to the spot where they had found the hen. They asked a man if anyone had lost a hen that morning.

“Yes,” the man said. “My brother lost one of his hens and he is so sad. He is very poor...” Before he could finish, Sandeep took the money from out of his pocket and said, “My dog caught his hen this morning. Here’s the money I sold it for. Please give it to your brother.” So saying he turned away. Suddenly he felt the flash of light before his eyes again. Sandeep smiled happily despite his rumbling stomach.

The next few weeks went by in a flurry of good deeds and brightening eyes. Sandeep could soon tell night from day and make out objects and figures, though very hazily. Then one day, he was sitting by the river with Moti. “My eyes are really getting better, Moti. You have been an invaluable friend and guide to me,” he said patting her head affectionately. Suddenly there was a cry for help. A

man's voice shouted, "Help me! I'm drowning!"

Sandeep did not know what to do. How could he, a blind boy, save a man from drowning? Then he quickly thought of Moti. She was an excellent swimmer. But what if she drowned? He had no one except her and he loved her so very much. Again the man's desperate voice was heard, shouting for help. This time Sandeep did not hesitate. "Go, Moti," he urged her. She quickly licked his face and then bounded away towards the river.

At last he heard the man haul himself on to the bank. Sandeep ran to him and asked, "Are you all right? Where's my dog?"

"Oh, my child! The dog saved my life but I'm afraid I could not save her," he gasped between deep breaths.

Sandeep let out a loud wail. "Moti, Moti, my faithful friend! What shall I do without you?" he cried bitterly.

The man put his arms around Sandeep comfortingly. "Don't cry, young one. I'm sure your father will buy you another dog."

"Oh no, he won't!" said Sandeep immediately. "He sent me out of the house when I was young, because I am blind."

Hearing this, the man gasped

suddenly. "Are you Sandeep?" he asked in a low voice.

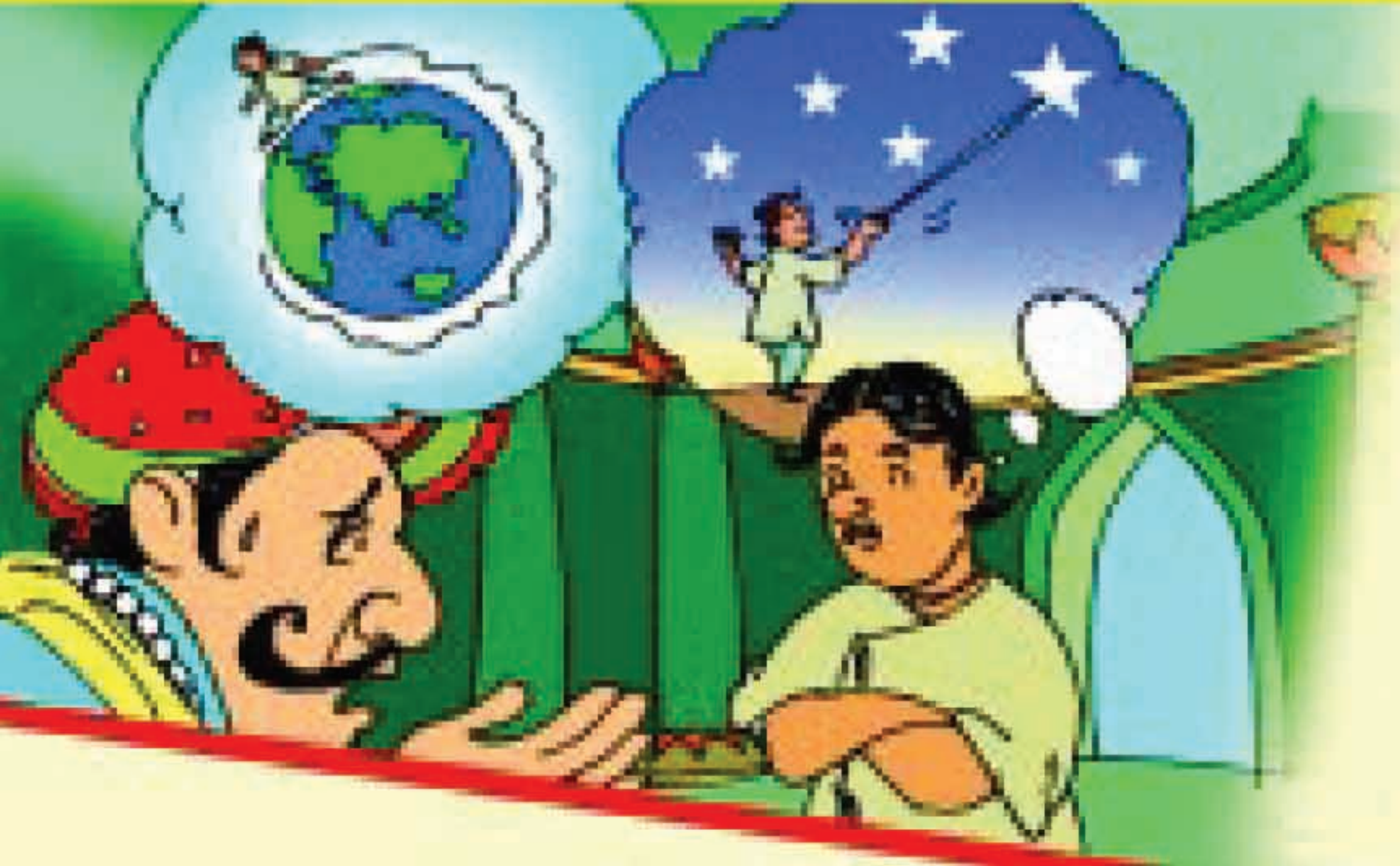
Sandeep looked closely at the man. It was his father! Yes, he could actually *see* his father! His last great act of kindness had cured his blindness completely! The father looked at Sandeep with joy and remorse. "I'm very sorry, my son. Please forgive me...come back home. I'll do all I can



to restore your sight," he said. And he was then surprised to see his son *looking* at him. "What? How?!" he asked. And soon, Sandeep, who had already forgiven his father, poured out the whole story. They slowly walked homewards.

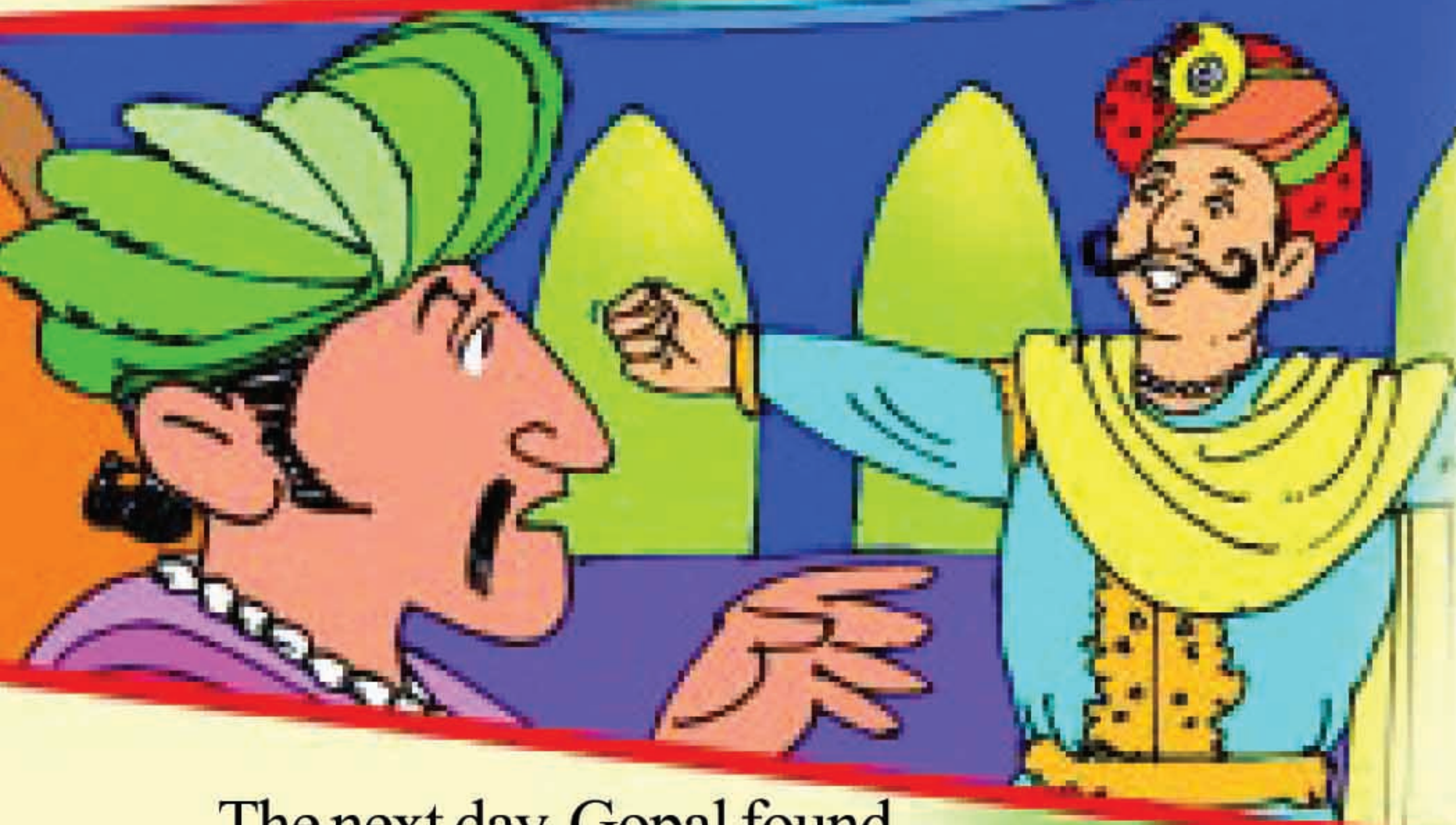
Later Sandeep got another dog named Minnie, but he never forgot his beloved Moti. After all, she had helped him regain his eyesight! **- Prashanti**

Men of Wit - Gopal Bhand



Gopal Bhand was the jester in the court of Raja Krishnachandra. One day, he found the Raja quite depressed. On enquiry, the Raja said: "It's the Nawab, again!" "Won't you tell your Gopal? Maybe I can help you," prompted Gopal.

"The Nawab wants me to measure the earth from one end to the other, and count the stars at the same time!" said the Raja. "Nothing is impossible for your Gopal," said the jester. "Ask for a lakh of rupees and tell him you'll need a year's time."



Raja Krishnachandra put up a brave face in front of the Nawab. "So you want a lakh of rupees? But why do you need a year's time to complete the job?" "Your highness, I can measure the earth all day and night, but the stars appear only in the night!"

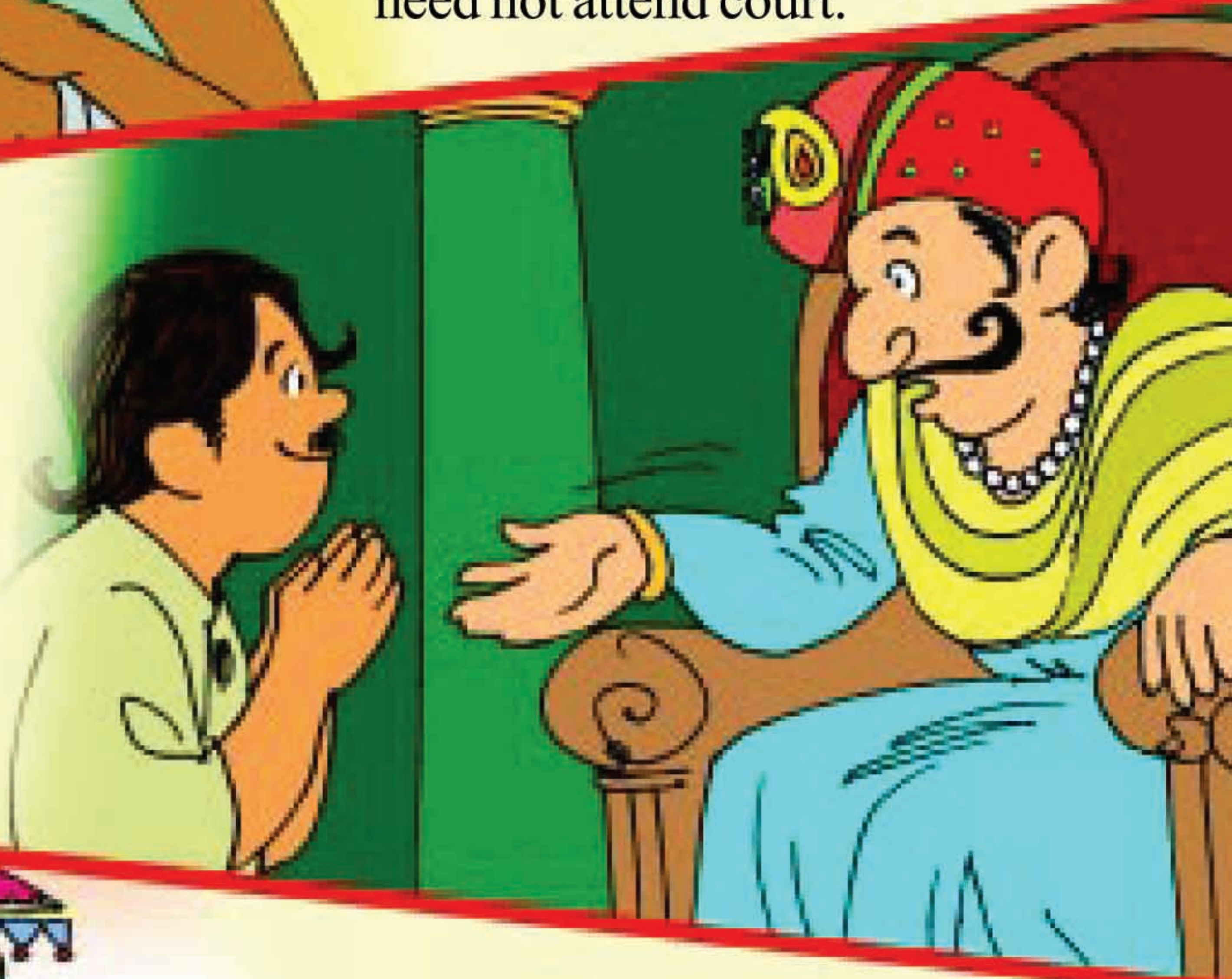
The next day, Gopal found the Raja smiling. "Here's the one lakh of rupees," said the Raja. "But do you really think you'll do the job in one year?" "Don't you worry, your majesty," assured Gopal, "I shall be back after one year."





Gopal spent the next one year enjoying life. He continued his profession as barber. Everybody wondered why he was not attending the court. "Oh, that? The Raja has given me a special job and till that is completed, I need not attend court."

At the end of one year, he went back to the Raja. "The job is done, your majesty," he said. "Have you measured the earth, and counted the stars?" asked the Raja, unbelievably. "Yes. Let's go to the Nawab tomorrow."



A procession wended its way to the Nawab's palace—the Raja on a horseback, followed by Gopal Bhand on foot, ten bullock carts carrying a mesh of fine thread, and ten shaggy sheep making up the rear.

"This is Gopal Bhand, who has done the job for me," the Raja introduced his jester. "Excellent. Now give me the figures!" "What figures?" said Gopal plainly. "The length of the thread is the circumference of the earth, and the number of stars and the hair on the sheep are the same!" Both the Nawab and the Raja were nonplussed.



Classical Indian Dances

Marvellous Manipuri



Dance is a way of life in Manipur, the land of jewels (*'mani'* - jewels, *'pur'* - land). It is believed that long ago, this State was peopled by *gundharvas* or celestial beings. Perhaps the Manipuris inherited their love for dance from their celestial ancestors. The dances of Manipur are as beautiful and graceful as the State itself, nestled among the hills of northeastern India.

The Manipuri dances also show evidence of Chinese influence. The Chinese had invaded this valley in A.D. 700. They settled down there, marrying the local people, and giving rise to a new race of people – the Indo-Mongoloids.

Though this dance form is believed to be very old, it was made popular in the rest of the country by the poet laureate of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore, in the early decades of the 20th century. He fell in love with the dance when he saw it performed at Machchimpur in 1920. He



immediately included it in the list of arts being taught at Shantiniketan, the school of fine arts that he had founded.

All forms of the Manipuri dance, whether folk, classical or modern, are devotional in nature. One of the most popular types of the Manipuri is the *Rasa*, which depicts the love story of Krishna and Radha.

The Manipuri dance is not restricted to a solo performance. There are group dances, too, and these are usually performed during the local festivals, like the dances performed during *Dol Jatra* or the *Holi* festival. Girls as well as boys actively participate in these dances.

The *Rakhaul* dance is performed by groups of boys. It depicts the play of Krishna with his mates. The colourful costumes enhance the grace and subtle movements of this dance. The *Lai-Haraoba*, which is a community dance,

portrays the love of Khamba-Thoibi, a romantic story similar to that of Laila-Majnu and Heer-Ranjha.

The Manipuri dances, especially those performed by boys, are sometimes fast in tempo, and involve abrupt jumps and sittings. The footwork of the dancers resemble the beat of the *khol* or the drums that keep rhythm.

The dances are usually accompanied by melodious singing. The most common instruments used are the cymbals, the *khol*, and the *pena*, which is a stringed instrument like the *ektara*. There is a wide variation in the rhythms, tempos and sound sequences, which build up from a whisper to a loud crescendo, from a slow rhythm to a finale, gathering momentum gradually. Manipuri boys sometimes hold a *khol* and *khanjani* or cymbals, while they dance.

A story from the Oraon tribe

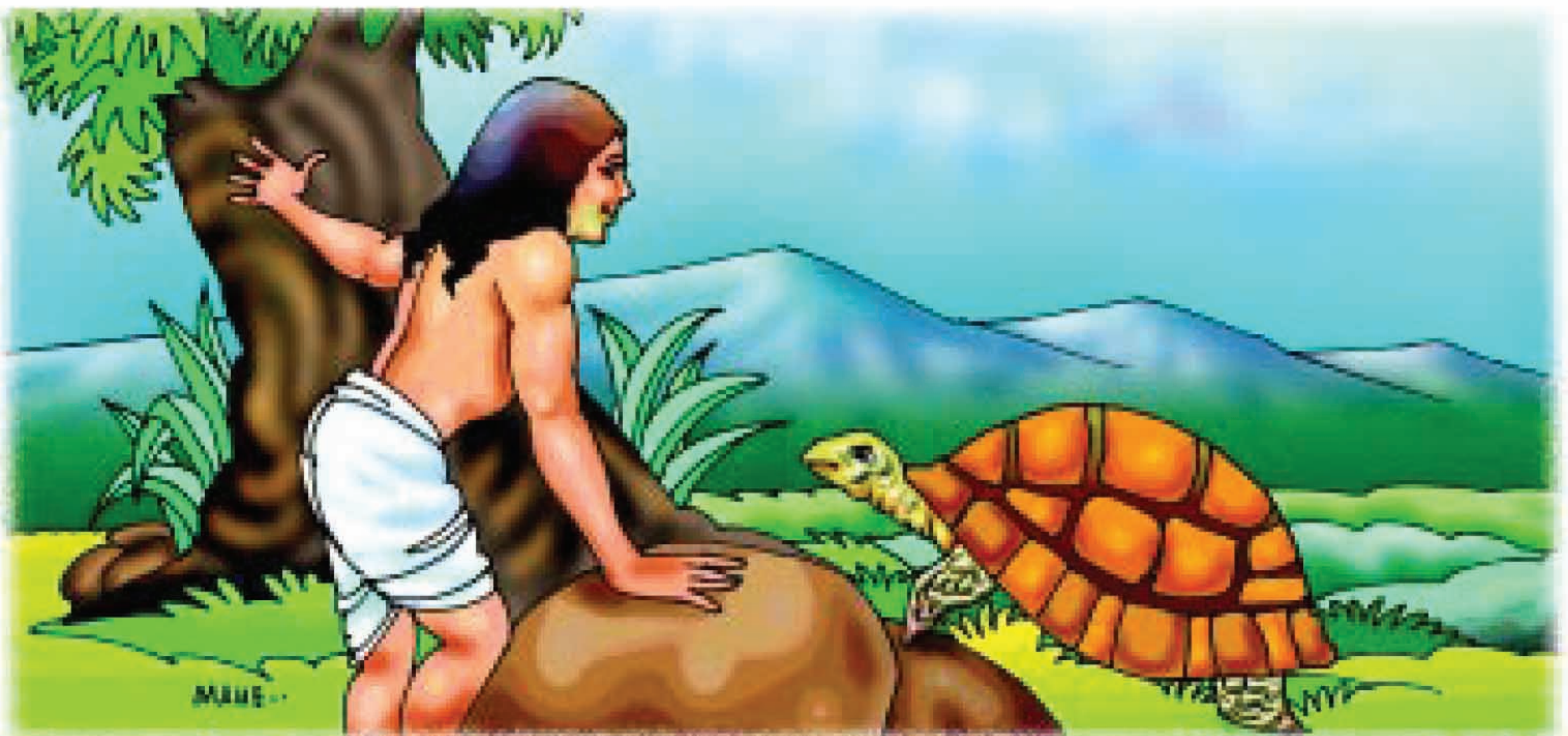
Their Home

The Oraons are a tribe spread over several States in central India – Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Maharashtra. It is believed that the tribe originally inhabited the Konkan coast in the south and they were driven northwards thousands of years ago by the pressure of increasing population.

The Oraons are considered one of the chief representatives of the Dravidian races.

The jackal judge

Jeetu, the young Oraon, whistled a merry tune as he hurried through the winding forest path to the bank of the river. He was on his way to his father-in-law's house in the *basti* across the river. He had sent his wife Karmi and his young son there already. And now he was going there for the *chhathi* ceremony of his brother-in-law's baby. While walking, Jeetu's eyes casually roved around and settled on a giant,



fleshy turtle, inching slowly from one bush to another.

‘Yumm... he looks delicious,’ thought Jeetu and, without wasting a moment, he pounced on the turtle. He lifted it with great effort. But the catch was certainly worth the sweat. ‘Now that I’ve a gift to take along, I needn’t feel bad to stay there for a while,’ he thought loudly. Soon he reached the bank of the river that marked the end of the Oraon basti to which he belonged. The basti was surrounded by the beautiful woods of the *Sarna*. Jeetu paid his respects to *Sarna Burhia* before proceeding further.

When he saw the river, however, Jeetu’s heart sank. For, it swelled and swirled, washing the banks with its white foams. The river was in spate! ‘I wonder how I’ll reach the other bank today,’ he wondered.

The river was not very deep and usually everybody crossed it on foot. So there was not even a ferry around. As he stood thinking, an idea struck him. He looked at the turtle he was carrying and the turtle stared back scornfully.

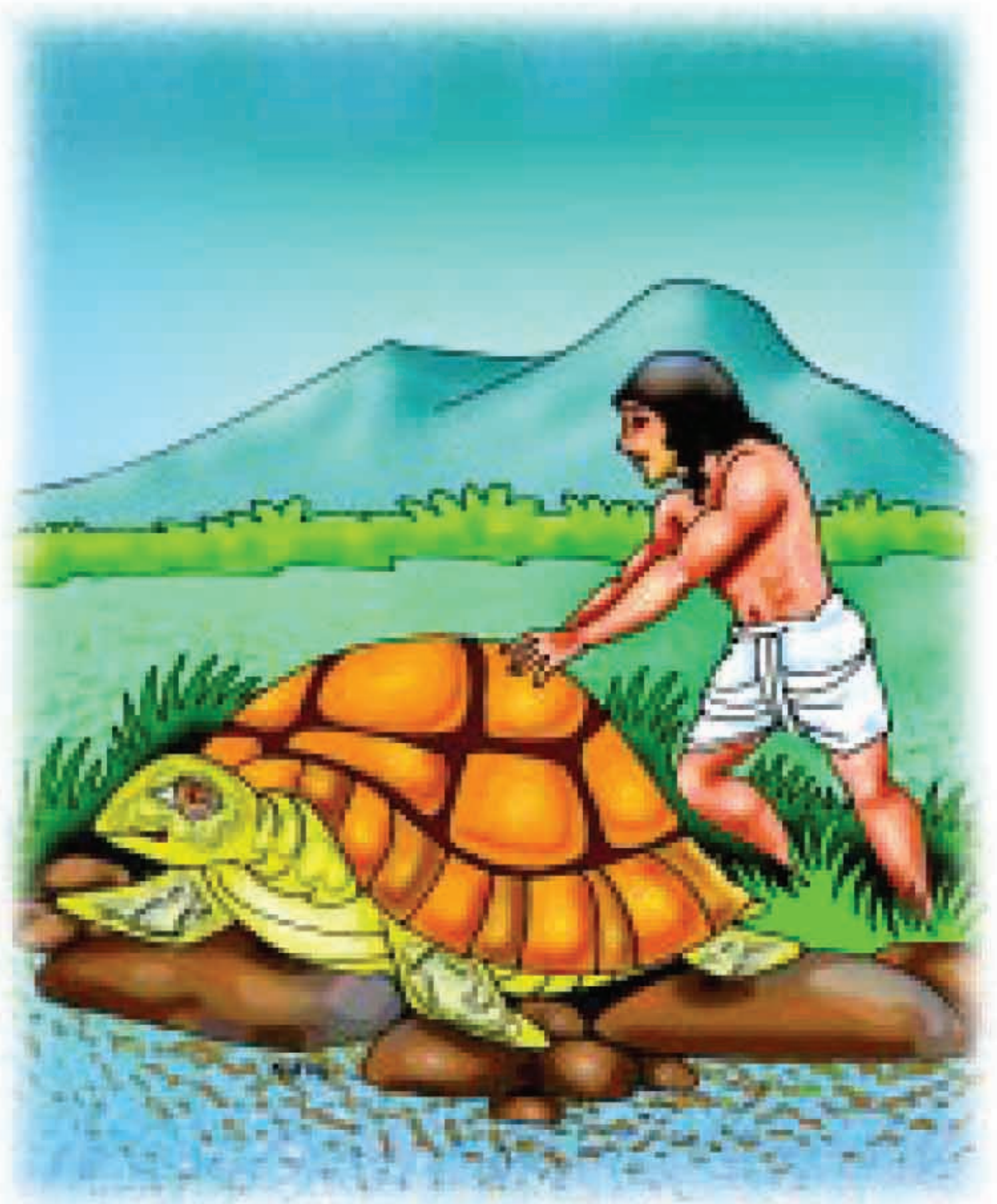
Jeetu spoke to the turtle in a mock-friendly voice. “Hey chum, would you mind taking me to the other bank? The river is flooded and I can’t cross it on foot.”

Their language

They speak a language called Kurukh. But over the years, they have adopted many dialects belonging to Aryan and Dravidian language families. Nowadays they also speak a language called Sadri.

The turtle got the mockery in Jeetu’s voice. ‘How these men change colours in a jiffy! They’re most unreliable! However, here’s an opportunity for me to escape from this fellow! Let me strike a deal with him,’ he thought.

“All right pal, but I want you to promise me something in return,” said the turtle. “You should set me free when we reach the other side of the river,”





The people

The men of this tribe are of medium height, dark complexioned and narrow headed. They have a broad nose and a sturdy physique. The women have very sharp facial features and a lissom grace that is best seen while they are dancing.

said the turtle as it watched Jeetu closely. With no other alternative to cross the flooded river, Jeetu agreed to the condition.

“What do you think I’ll want to do with a poor creature like you?” asked Jeetu, without any trace of scruples. “As soon as we reach the other bank, you can go your way and I’ll go mine.”

Satisfied with the reply, the turtle slithered into the turbulent waters and Jeetu clambered on its back. Soon they reached the other bank and he hopped on to the land.

Jeetu eyed the giant turtle longingly as it dived deep into the river. ‘I’ll one day taste this plump animal,’ he determined.

Jeetu had a nice time at his father-in-law’s house. He ate a great feast which had all his favourite dishes: plenty of fried fish with salt and chilli, and gallons of *haria* and *mohua*. He and all his relatives revelled all night, dancing

and singing. He had swayed to the wonderful sounds of the *mander* and the *lohati nagera*. Karmi and the other women looked gorgeous in their ornaments after a bath with *nagri mitti*.

Soon it was time to get back to his village. His wife and son wanted to stay for a few more days and so Jeetu left for home alone. As he walked down to the bank of the river, he sang out aloud his favourite song:

“In summer the jungle burns /All the birds leave the jungle.

*In asadh the rain comes/ The branches grow again,
And the birds return to the jungle.”*

When he reached the river, he noticed that the flood had not subsided. The river was still rough. Luckily for him, he spotted the same turtle that had helped him cross the river earlier.

‘Oh! What a nice surprise!’ he chuckled. “The earth is a small place and we keep meeting again and again, don’t



we?” called out Jeetu to the turtle.

The turtle was startled but turned around rather unhurriedly to see who it was.

“Yes, indeed,” it mumbled in reply.

“I hope you wouldn’t mind carrying me to the other bank,” Jeetu said to the turtle. To his surprise it obliged without any questions this time. Both man and animal did not speak a word as they crossed the river. And it was the turtle that broke the silence when they were halfway across the river.

“What are you thinking?” it asked Jeetu.

Now the Oraons believe that one should not utter a lie while crossing a river, because if a man speaks a lie while in the water, he will get drowned. So Jeetu had to speak the truth. “I was

thinking that I could take you home and eat you. For today I haven’t promised that I’d spare you,” he said.

“It’s really wretched of you to talk like that. But I had guessed your intentions. Aren’t you curious to know what I was thinking?” the turtle snorted.

“What is it?” asked Jeetu.

“I’m going to drown you in the river. I hadn’t promised to transport you safely today, did I?” it retorted.

Jeetu was terrified. “No, no, please! Please don’t do that,” he cried out.

“Why not? You deserve it for intending to do me harm,” the turtle grunted.

Their occupation

Oraons are basically farmers. They also have a good knowledge of the curative and harmful attributes of various plants and animals. Hunting is another major occupation of the Oraons. Some of them engage themselves in cultivation.



Just then, Jeetu saw a jackal that was lying on the river bank where his village was.

“Okay, let us ask that jackal whether you should let me go or not,” he said to

Their beliefs

Oraons, like other tribal people, have strong beliefs in spirits, totems, taboo, and many rituals and superstitions. Here are some of their beliefs:

- * If a hunter dreams of a bride brought to his house, then he will succeed in killing a deer. If he dreams of killing an animal, then he might get killed himself.



- * For a hunter, passing by a woman with an empty pot is the worst omen possible. But to see a woman carrying a pitcher full of water is considered very auspicious.

- * An arrow is considered worthless if it is pointed at a jackal or if a woman steps on it.



the turtle. He was worried the turtle might drown him before giving him a chance to escape.

“All right. Also ask him whether you can eat me?” said the turtle.

The jackal heard the voices and turned towards the twosome arguing in the middle of the river.

“Hello, wise one!” Jeetu and the turtle called out together. The jackal pricked up his ears and tried to listen to what the man and the turtle shouted to him. But he could not hear a single word of what he said. Jeetu was yelling his lungs out, so the jackal must have been pretending that he had not heard a word.

“I can’t hear you. Can you speak a bit louder?” the jackal asked. Now the turtle narrated their dispute.

“Oh no! I don’t know what the problem with my ear is. Can you come

closer and speak?” the jackal said again.

Now the turtle swam faster and came closer to the bank. The jackal still could not hear them. And once again he requested them to come nearer. And now the turtle was right on the river bank. Jeetu was about to open his mouth and tell the jackal about their argument.

“You idiot, jump to the land,” the jackal yelled at him. Jeetu leaped forward and was happy to be safe.

“And what are you waiting for, you fool? Swim away before he catches you!” the jackal shouted to the turtle. The turtle quickly plunged into the river and was gone.

And the wise jackal went back to his nap.



Glossary:

Basti: colony of houses.

Chhathi: the sixth day after the birth of a baby. On this day, *Bhelua* leaves (*Semrarpis anacardium*) are placed beside the baby. The touch of the *Bhelua* makes a person swell up painfully. Oraons believe that exposing the baby to the plant in its early days would be like vaccinating it, or immunising it for the rest of its life.

Sarna: Sal tree.

Sarna Burhia: the principal deity.

Haria: strong rice beer fermented in large earthen gourds served to guests at functions.

Mohua: strong spirit distilled from the dried corollas of the mohua flowers.

Mander: drum originally hewn from the bole of the gambhar tree. It is also made of clay.

Lohati nagera: another type of drum.

Nagri mitti: black loam, which the Oraon use as soap. It is very soft and is used for washing the body as well as the hair.

Boiled eggs and cooked peas!

Two months had passed and Azeez had spent every one of them gazing hopefully at the sky. Would it rain? The question was on every lip in the village and on every mind. What would happen to the crops if the rain failed? But the rain god was in no mood to listen to anyone's prayers. The sun blazed mercilessly; the earth was parched and the crops shrivelled up and died. All the villagers were dejected.

The worst affected was poor Azeez, whose little patch of land actually developed cracks. He was so disillusioned that he sold his land, and went away in search of greener pastures. Just before he left, he took a dozen hard-boiled eggs on credit from Mirchand, a merchant in his village. He walked away sadly into the sunset.

The merchant wrote off the hard-

boiled eggs as a bad debt. 'Poor fellow,' he thought to himself, in a rare moment of tenderness. 'How can I expect him to pay for the eggs when he does not have a *paisa* in the world? The eggs will ensure that he will not starve to death for ten days or so.'

But Azeez did not starve to death. He lived – and how! Seven years passed before Azeez returned to the village. And when Mirchand and the villagers set eyes on him next, Azeez was galloping down on a fine white steed followed by a line of horse-drawn carts.

Azeez tossed a silken purse of silver coins and another of gold coins and acquired property in the village: a bungalow, a few acres of agricultural land and a grove of fruit-bearing trees. The villagers could hardly believe their eyes: how had he come by so much wealth?

Mirchand had not forgotten his hard-boiled eggs. He knocked at Azeez's bungalow one day. A smartly dressed servant opened the door. "I want to meet Azeez!"

The servant sniggered into his sleeve as he showed him in. Azeez welcomed him warmly. But Mirchand was in no mood for niceties. "Azeez," he began without a preamble. "Do you remember, when you left the village seven years



ago, I gave you a dozen eggs on credit? You owe me a thousand gold coins for the eggs!”

“A thousand gold coins for a dozen eggs? You must be joking!” Azeez was quite shocked. “I’m grateful to you for the eggs you loaned me. I’m willing to pay a reasonable amount for them, too. But a thousand gold coins is just too much!”

“I’ll take a thousand gold coins and no less!” insisted Mirchand stubbornly.

But Azeez would not change his stance and Mirchand stomped away threatening to take him to court.

Mirchand was as good as his word. He hauled Azeez to court. When the case came up for hearing, Azeez did not turn up for a long time. Mirchand fretted and fumed. At last Azeez appeared – two hours late.

As soon as he set eyes on him, Mirchand burst out angrily: “My lord, here he comes, the man who denied me my rightful fortune. Had I retained those dozen eggs that I loaned him, they might have hatched into fine chicks and grown into healthy hens and I would have had a thriving egg trade by now! But I gave all that up to help him at a difficult time. But now he refuses to pay me for the eggs! And what’s worse, he has the audacity to be late for the hearing!”

The judge was very irritated. “You are accused of cheating. And you’ve held up the work of this court! What



have you to say for yourself?”

“My lord, please pardon me for the delay!” began Azeez, with an apologetic smile. “I was busy planting *chole* in my kitchen garden!”

“Planting *chole*? What do you mean?” the judge was puzzled.

“My lord, my cook made *chole* out of chick peas today. I suddenly thought it would be a good idea to plant some of the *chana*, the chick peas, that is, from the *chole* so that I could reap a harvest of *chana* in my garden!”

“What a fool you are, Azeez!” chuckled Mirchand. “Don’t you know that cooked *chana* in *chole* will not sprout and grow into plants?”

“Why not?” asked Azeez, innocently. “If hard-boiled eggs could hatch into chicks, cooked *chole* could grow into trees, too!”

Mirchand was speechless. The judge smiled. Azeez had won his case!

NEWS FLASH

Age : 12,500,000,000 years

That is the age of the universe, and it has been accepted by scientists the world over. Ah! You would like to know how they came to this conclusion, wouldn't you? Researchers working on the project of ascertaining the age of the universe chanced upon the presence of active uranium in a very old star. They used a new technique called "radioactive cosmo chronometry". They found that this technique was fault-free compared to the techniques they had depended on earlier. The star they selected for study is named C. S. 31082-001, which was surveyed with the help of the giant telescope in Paranal in Chile, South America. The presence of uranium on this star helped them ascertain the age of the universe.



Life on Mars

Scientists in Hungary have claimed that there is clear evidence of life on Mars. They came to this discovery after studying 60,000 photographs of the planet taken from all angles. They have traced thousands of footprints, resembling those of living beings on earth, on the snow-covered southern hemisphere of Mars.

"Birth" of America

It is generally believed that Christopher Columbus reached American shores—actually San Salvador—in 1492. Do you know when the name America was first used? It was on a map made in 1507. An Italian explorer called Amerigo Vespucci visited the New World in 1501-02 and decided that it was a separate continent. Cartographer Martin Mueller marked the continent as America in honour of Vespucci. This map—there is no copy of it—has now been bought by the Library of Congress in the USA for 10,000,000 dollars for its archives.



Lottery luck

Instead of buying a loaf of bread with the money she was given, a 50-year-old unemployed woman in Frankfurt, Germany, went for a lottery ticket on September 1 and hit the jackpot worth 10,000,000 US dollars. She is normally not given to "indulging" in lottery, but that day she was so distraught over her financial plight that she decided to go hungry and try her luck otherwise. Those who wish to emulate her might not meet Dame Luck!

Know Your India

Quiz

This month, it is a miscellany. Find out how many answers you have on your fingertips. Here we go!

1. On which date did India reach the 1 billion mark in population?
2. The world's highest peak, Everest, is in the Nepal-Tibet border. Which is India's highest peak? Height?
3. Five rivers have given the name Punjab to that State. Which are the rivers?
4. Which three new States were formed last year? Name them; also their capitals.
5. After Independence, one of the States had two women Chief Ministers. Which State? Who were the Chief Ministers?

(Answers next month)

Answers to October Quiz

1. Onam, celebrated in Kerala, to mark the annual visit of King Mahabali who was sent to the nether world by Vamana, the fifth incarnation of Vishnu.
2. Diwali. On November 14.
3. Vijayadasami, one day after Navratri, dedicated to Saraswati, the goddess of Learning. The Bengalis perform Saraswati Puja on Basant Panchami day.
4. Rakhi or Raksha Bandhan and Bhai-dhuj.
5. Khorbad-Sal, the birthday of Zaruthushtra.
6. Id. Also called Milad-un-Nabi.
7. Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion.
8. The Buddha was born on this particular full moon day; He got enlightenment on this day; He also attained Nirvana on this day.
9. Pongal.
10. The Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala where the devotees can watch a divine aura on the sky, far away, for a few moments.

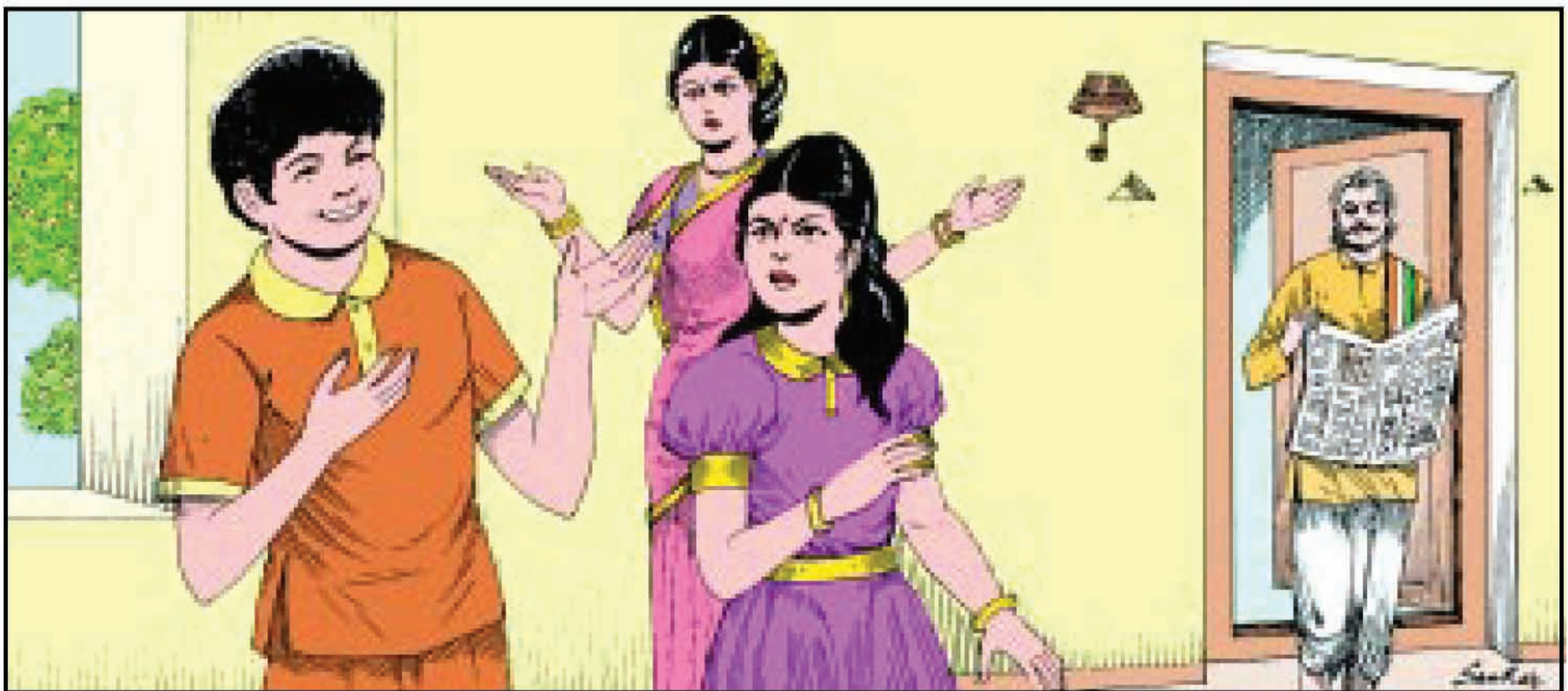
Answers to November Quiz

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Dhruva-King Uttanapada | 4. Nachiketa - Vajasrawas |
| 2. Markandeya - Mrikandu | 5. Ekalavya - Kauravas and Pandavas |
| 3. Prahlada - Lord Vishnu | 6. Bharata - King Dushyanta |

Saga of India

Glimpses of a great civilisation –
its glorious quest for Truth through the ages

23. The Sita you do not know



Sandip's resounding laughter and Chameli's shrill protest over some issue pleasantly surprised their grandfather, Professor Devnath. He did not remember having ever heard Sandip laugh so loud.

Newspaper in hand, he came out to the verandah. Almost simultaneously emerged Jayashree, his daughter-in-law, from the drawing room. "Naughty ones! All you do is manage to spoil the peace of others!" she said in a subdued voice, taking the children to task. She feared that her children had disturbed the professor's repose. But her anxiety

vanished when she understood that her father-in-law had finished taking his afternoon nap and was reading the newspaper.

"Baba, shall I take your tea into your room?" asked Jayashree.

"Welcome, but first shouldn't we investigate the cause of our Sandip's fun?" said the inquisitive professor, looking meaningfully at his grandson.

"Grandpa, how would you feel if you were to hear that I had been selected to lead the Indian Olympic team to Beijing? Can you help laughing?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe I'll then join



the team declaring myself as the national wrestling champion,” answered Professor Devnath with a chuckle.

“Better you join Chameli’s team in the role of Nana Sahib, for she has been allotted the role of Lakshmibai, the valiant Rani of Jhansi, in the drama to be staged during her school’s Golden Jubilee celebrations. O God, Chameli in the role of the Rani of Jhansi! The sensitive and timid dove that she is, I could have appreciated her appearing in the role of Sita!” observed Sandip.

“I’ve no comment to make on dear Chameli’s fitness or otherwise for the role of the glorious Rani. Well, for your information, Lakshmibai herself was extremely gentle, shy, and tender as a

little girl. Yet, when the occasion demanded, she shook the very morale of the highly skilled British generals and set an all-time example in patriotism, bravery, and courage. But that’s a different issue. What really makes me sad is your notion of Sita. How dare you consider her timid?”

Jayashree, holding a tray with tea, deliberately made her way into the professor’s room through the verandah so that he would follow her. The professor did so, trailed by Sandip and Chameli.

“Baba, Sita unfortunately is always portrayed as timid and shy - a helpless victim of cruel circumstances,” remarked Jayashree.

“Right, and isn’t that true?” demanded Sandip.

“Far from being true is that popular impression. Sit down and I shall put just a few questions to you. Thereafter you are free either to stick to your impression or to revise it. To begin with, I hope you know that it was Rama who was required to go into the forest and not Sita.”

“Of course, we know,” said Jayashree. She and the two children had already taken their seats.

“Now, who asked Sita to go on a self-exile? Wasn’t that her own decision, against repeated pleadings from all the

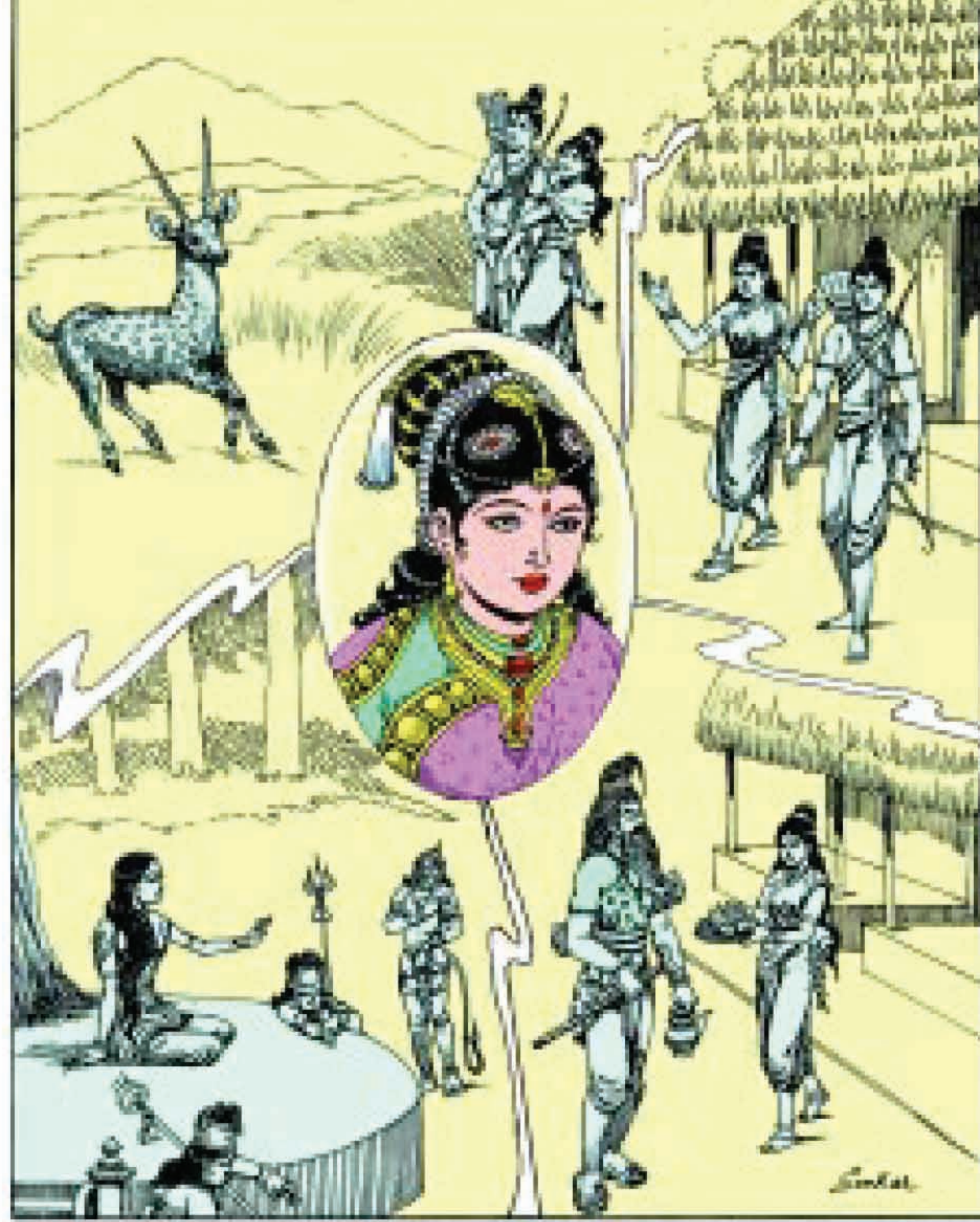
elders? Didn't she stubbornly cling to her resolve?"

The professor paused for an answer. But there was none. Jayashree alone had read the original *Ramayana*, but she had made both Sandip and Chameli read a shorter version of the epic. All of them remembered the story well.

The professor continued, "My children, please reflect on the chain of events without being influenced by your stock notions. Inside the forest it was Sita who wanted to have the golden deer and Rama had to chase it. Again, when the demon who had assumed the form of a deer gave out a deceptive call of distress, imitating Rama's voice, it was Sita who compelled Lakshmana to rush to the spot. She chose to remain alone, unprotected. Once again it was she who violated the condition made by Lakshmana and crossed the Lakshman Rekha to give alms to Ravana who was in disguise and thus kidnapped her. Were all these signs of timidity? Was she lacking in a will of her own? Rather, was it not her will that was giving shape to the situation at the most important points of time?"

"Well, I had not looked at the situation from that point of view, I must admit," said a smiling Jayashree.

"Thanks a lot, Mother; if you had not looked at the situation in this light,



can Grandpa blame creatures of ignorance like us?" commented Sandip with a twinkle in his eyes.

But the professor's eyes were half closed; it was as if he was wandering in some remote space and time.

"As you know, Hanuman who discovered Sita in the gardens of the demon king offered to carry her back across the sea to Rama's camp. But Sita would not agree to his proposal. And look at her argument: Ravana stole her; if Rama's emissary also steals her away, where's the difference between the two? Rama must rescue her after vanquishing the demon! Is that a sign of timidity? Compassionate that she was, she was also concerned about

Hanuman's safety. Finally, after the war was over, it was she - not Rama - who ordered for the Agni Pariksha or the fire-test. Such was her personality that everybody had to act according to her wish or what she thought to be the right course of action."

The professor sat silent for a while and so did his three listeners. It was Chameli who, while taking the empty tea cup from the professor's hand, said, "Grandpa, why did Sita refuse to go through another fire-test at the end of the *Ramayana* and instead entered the earth?"

"That is a good question to ask, my child! You see, the first time it was she who ordered for the fire-test; the second time she was advised by others to go through it. There is a world of difference between the two occasions. She was under no obligation to prove her purity

before a motley crowd. She knew that the people did not deserve her. I hope you remember that she had originally emerged from the earth. Hence she decided to return to the earth. She had incarnated to inspire Rama to destroy the terrible forces of darkness and tyranny represented by Ravana. She had accomplished that. Her mission was over. Rama was yet to illustrate the norms of good administration so that Ramrajya could become the model for all times to come. But I must hasten to inform you, children, that the last canto of the epic, known as the *Uttara Kanda*, was not composed by Valmiki. The original *Ramayana* ends with Rama's return to Ayodhya and his coronation. The last canto was added by some other gifted poet," said the professor in conclusion.

- Visvavasu

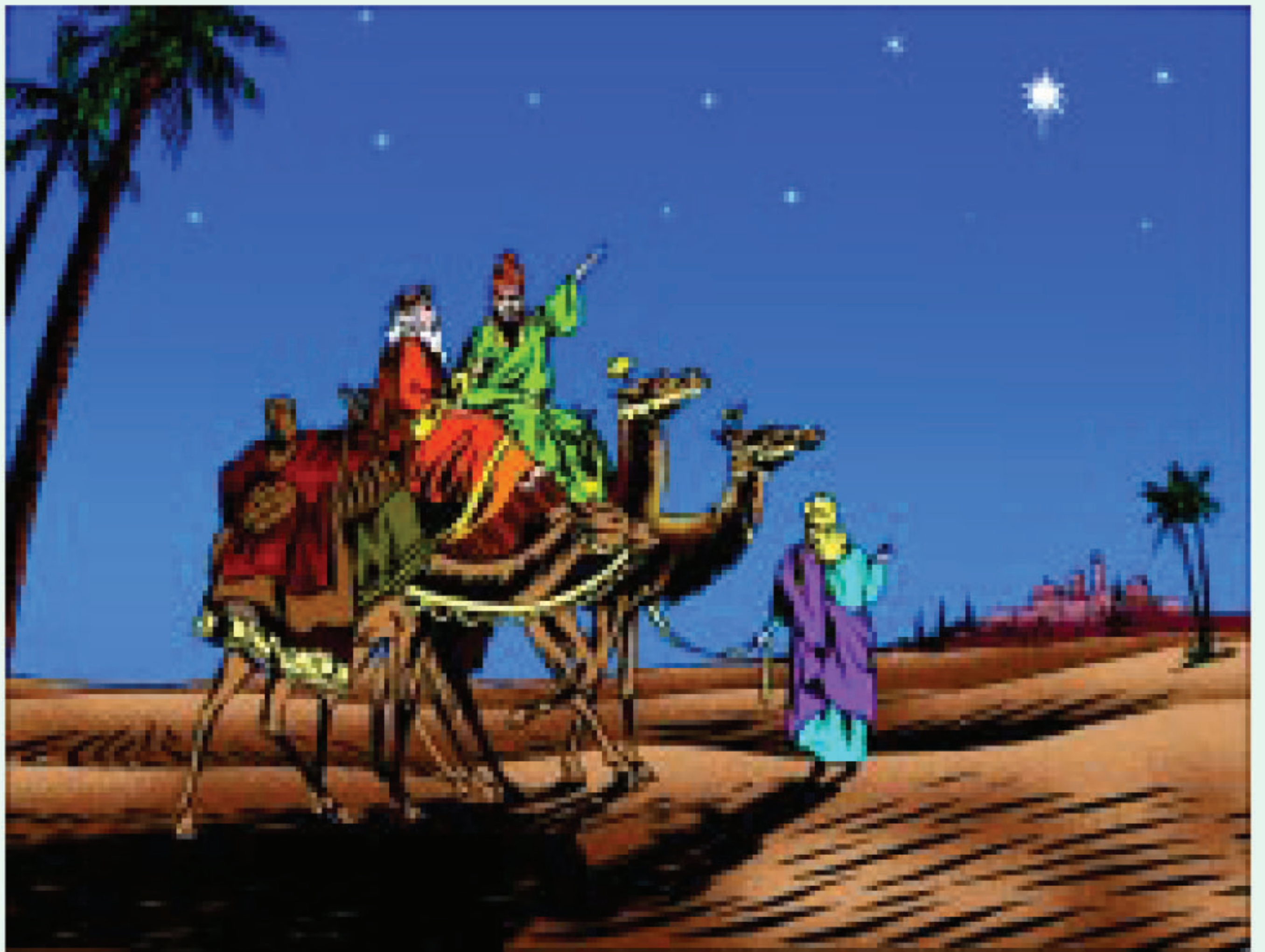


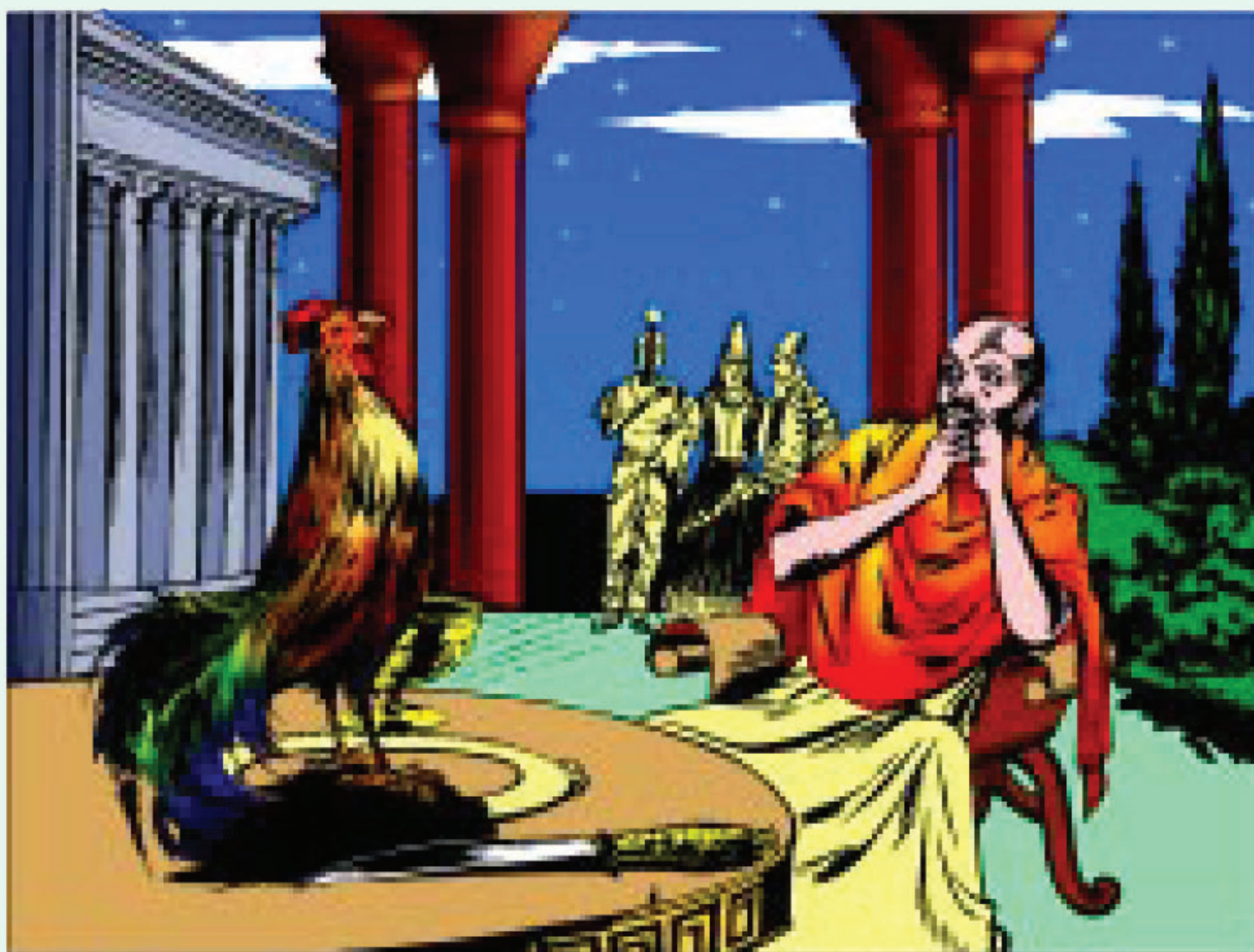


*“For little children everywhere
A joyous season still we
make;
We bring our precious gifts to
them,
For dear child Jesus’s sake.”*

Thus sang poet Cary in *Christmas*. This is the day—the 25th of December—on which Jesus Christ is believed to have been born 2001 years ago, in the village of Bethlehem, in Judea.

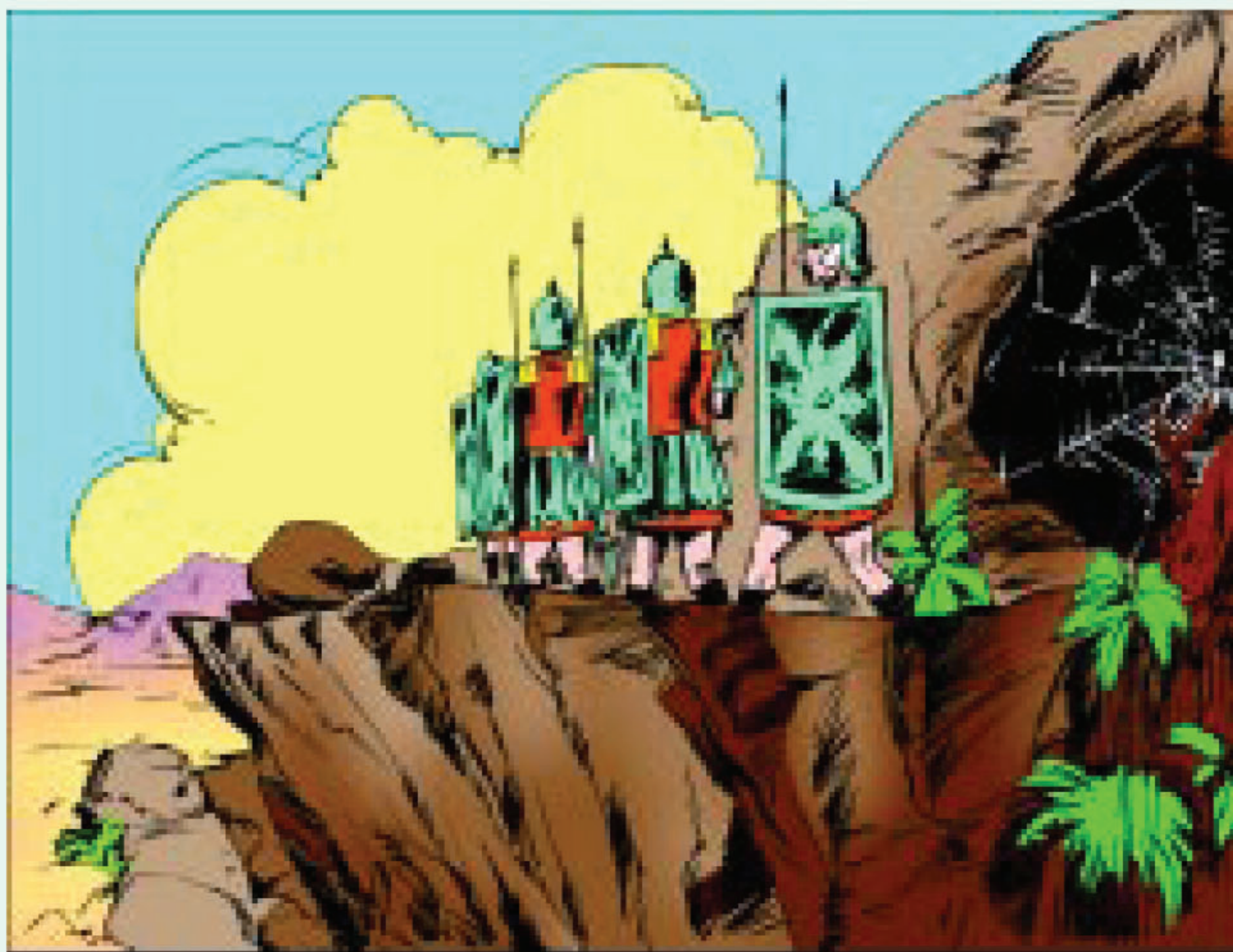
That Jesus, the Son of God, had just been born on earth was revealed to three wise men of the East. A luminous star guided them to the distant cottage where Mary, the mother, was nursing her child with the help of her husband, Joseph. The wise men carried gifts for the divine child. That was how gift-giving on Christmas became a custom.





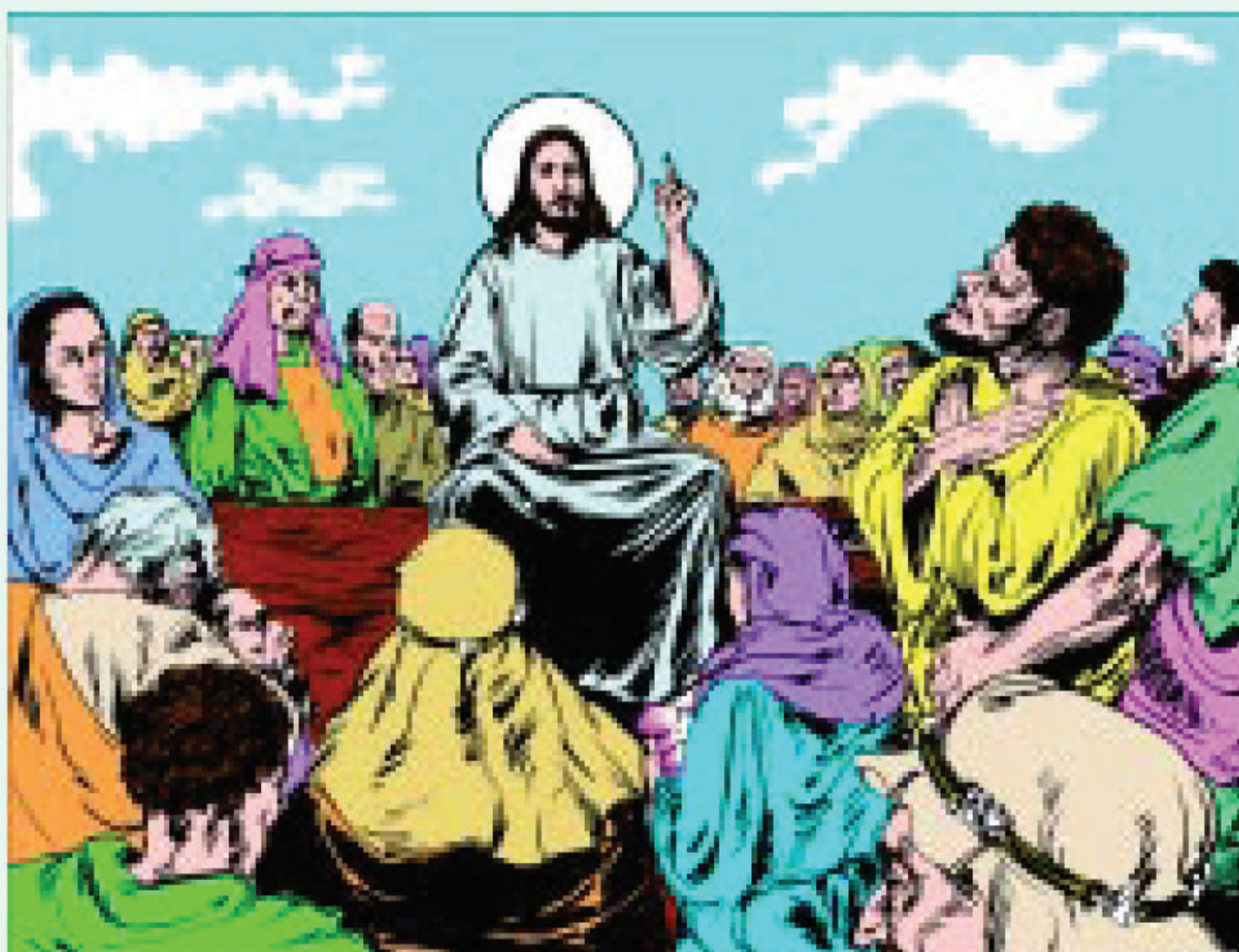
Herod, the King of Judea, was told by a cock that a new king, who would rule over people's hearts, had been born. Herod got the cock roasted for his dinner and said: "If it's true, the roasted cock should crow!" To his horror, the roasted cock rose from the dish and crowed!

The horrified and furious king sent his soldiers to kill the child. Joseph and Mary fled with the child. Tired, they slept inside a cave. Immediately a spider spun a web covering the mouth of the cave. Herod's soldiers did not search the cave, thinking, if anybody had entered, the web would have snapped.



Joseph and Mary, with Jesus, passed by a field where a farmer was sowing grain. As soon as they passed, the crop grew miraculously. When the king's soldiers asked him if he had seen a family pass by, the farmer replied: "Yes, but before these crops grew!" The soldiers went away.

Thus Jesus escaped several attempts to kill him. As he grew up, people flocked to listen to his message of love, compassion and truth. This was how Christianity was born.



Long before Christianity reached England, the English used to celebrate their New Year Day on December 25. In several other Western countries, people worshipped the Sun god during the second half of December. As time passed, the traditional spirit of festivities combined with Christmas.

New elements were added to the festive spirit in course of time. In the 8th century, the fir tree became the symbol of people's homage to Christ. This tradition first developed in Germany.





But today who can think of Christmas without Father Christmas or Santa Claus? In the 4th century, there was a merchant in Lycia who had three daughters. The merchant was sad because he had no money to perform the marriage of his daughters.

There was a kind-hearted bishop named Nicholas. When he realised the merchant's problem, he secretly dropped a bag full of money into his house. Needless to say, the daughters were happily married.



In course of time, Nicholas came to be called Saint Nicholas. Soon 'Saint Nicholas' became Santa Claus! He was known as a giver of gifts.



Many legends have developed around Santa Claus! He was visualised as going about in a sledge, drawn by reindeers and never separated from his magic bag of gifts.

He is also believed to be capable of flying and dropping his gift packets through chimneys!

Santa Claus has become the symbol of goodwill towards children. He is synonymous with generosity.





THE ENIGMATIC DOCTOR AND HIS STRANGE PROPHECIES

*M*ore than 400 years ago, Lord Florinville, a nobleman of France, one day had an important guest with him. They were discussing prophecies. Suddenly, he jovially asked his guest: "Can you tell me the fate of the two suckling pigs in the courtyard?"

"Your Lordship would eat the black pig and the wolf the white one," replied the other instantly.

The nobleman then went to his cook and ordered the white pig to be killed for that night's dinner. Soon the table was laid and the two gentlemen began to dine.

"So, you're perhaps not aware that we're now eating the white pig," put in the lord with a chuckle.

"No, your Lordship, as I've already said, we're indeed eating the black one," calmly insisted the other.

The puzzled nobleman sent for his cook who confessed to what had taken place. The tame wolf cub belonging to the lord's men unfortunately stole away the whole meat. So the terrified cook

had killed the black pig and prepared it for dinner.

How did the nobleman's guest know the fate of the pigs? Who was he?

He was none other than Michel de Nostredame, more commonly known by the Latin form of his name, Nostradamus. He was born in St. Remy, in southern France, on December 14, 1503. He studied medicine and became a physician. During the outbreak of the plague in 1546-47, he gained renown

as a specially gifted healer with innovative methods of treatment and his success at curing patients extremely ill.

However, it was around 1547, when he began to make prophecies that he shot into prominence and was later described as "the king amongst prophets". In 1555, he published his work in a book

titled *Centuries* consisting of quatrains or 4-line verses grouped in hundreds. Each set of 100 quatrains was called a century and they described the events of a particular millennium, starting from the middle of 1500 and ending in the distant future with the year 3797, when



it is predicted that the world will come to an end.

Because of their enigmatic and obscure language and style, many of the quatrains cannot be understood and properly explained. But some of them that are simple and direct have proved to be awfully true! Or were they instances of sheer coincidence?

Thus ran one of the verses of Nostradamus:

The young lion will overcome the old one

On the field of battle in a single combat;

He will put out his eyes in a cage of gold,

Two wounds in one, and then to die a cruel death.

It so happened that on the 1st of July 1559, a merry feast and revelry were going on in the castle of Henry II of France. Two of the beautiful princesses were getting married, one to the King of Spain and the other to the Duke of Savoy.

A tournament was on amidst great fanfare. King Henry II was participating in a joust with the young Count of Montgomery. They rode past on handsome horses, attacking each other with their shining lances. Each tried to topple his opponent. But none succeeded in doing so. The tournament was declared a draw. But the excited king insisted on having another round of encounter.



The Count willy-nilly responded to the challenge. The match was brief, for soon the dazzling lance of the Count struck the king's golden visor, the part of the helmet covering his face, shattered it, and pierced his eye and cut his forehead. Henry II fell down and died ten days later, of pain and agony.

All those who had read the verse quoted above foretelling this sad event were baffled! How could Nostradamus know about it? Many were even angry with him. They thought the mishap had occurred as a result of his evil prophecy.

These are only two of the legends about the uncanny foresight of the enigmatic doctor.

Did Nostradamus possess some supernatural powers?

Once after a long day, Nostradamus was resting when there was a loud knock on his door. A nobleman's family had lost a dog. So, they had sent a page to ask him where to look for it. It is said that before the boy had explained the

purpose of his visit, Nostradamus called out without opening the door: "Look for the dog on the road to Orleans. There it would be found on a leash."

On reaching the road, the boy indeed met a servant leading the dog home!

How could Nostradamus know the mission of the page and the whereabouts of the dog?

Is it really possible to foresee an event of the present century more than four hundred years ago? Indeed, through his 4-line verses, Nostradamus is said to have predicted the rise and fall of Hitler, the two World Wars, the French Revolution, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the great fire of London, and the destruction of the space shuttle *Challenger*.

Did he really have some secret knowledge? Or was he a mere juggler with words?

One of his quatrains reads:

*In the year of the
new century and nine
months,*

*From the sky will
come a great king of
terror*

*The sky will burn at
45 degrees,*

*Fire approaches the
great new city.*

Immediately huge,
December 2001

scattered flame leaps up...

The great new city, New York, lies between 40 degrees and 45 degrees parallel. Perhaps a striking coincidence! Did Nostradamus really predict the attack on the World Trade Center and the terrifying events of September 11, 2001?

Whenever something terrible happens, verses galore in the name of Nostradamus circulate everywhere at a furious pace. Way back in the later days of World War II, because people of Europe had developed a faith in the prophecies of Nostradamus, the Germans had made fake verses in his name and distributed them in the lands they were attacking to serve their purpose. The British, on the other hand,

returned the trick by faking more verses and dropping them from the air to serve their purpose, too.

After the death of Nostradamus on July 2, 1566 it was rumoured that a secret document that could perhaps shed more light on his prophecies is kept in his coffin. We do not know what ultimately happened to it, or if it was there at all! But, Nostradamus has remained an enigma ever since!

Chandamama



18. End of the Krishna Avatar

*D*ronacharya's son, Ashwattama, wanted to wipe out the Pandavas completely and he used his weapon on Uttara's unborn child. As a result, the child was stillborn. Krishna, however, placed his foot on the child and examined the child and revived him. The child was, therefore, called Parikshit, one who has been tested. He was later to succeed Yudhishthira on the throne at Indraprastha.

Dhritarashtra and Gandhari grieved over the outcome of the Mahabharata war. All their hundred sons had died on the battlefield. Dhritarashtra's anger turned against Bhima who had done the maximum damage. He asked Krishna to bring him to him. Though blind, Dhritarashtra was very strong. Krishna understood the secret intention behind the king's request and placed an iron image of Bhima in

front of him. Dhritarashtra embraced the image, which was crushed to a powder.

Gandhari got very upset with Krishna for not having stopped the war. She cursed him saying, the same way her family had been wiped out so would the Yadavas be wiped off



the face of the earth, and there would be no one left to carry on Krishna's lineage.

Krishna was aware that this would come about, and so his answer was a gentle smile. He said: "The words of a great and noble soul like you will surely come true. It is the divine power in you that utters these words."

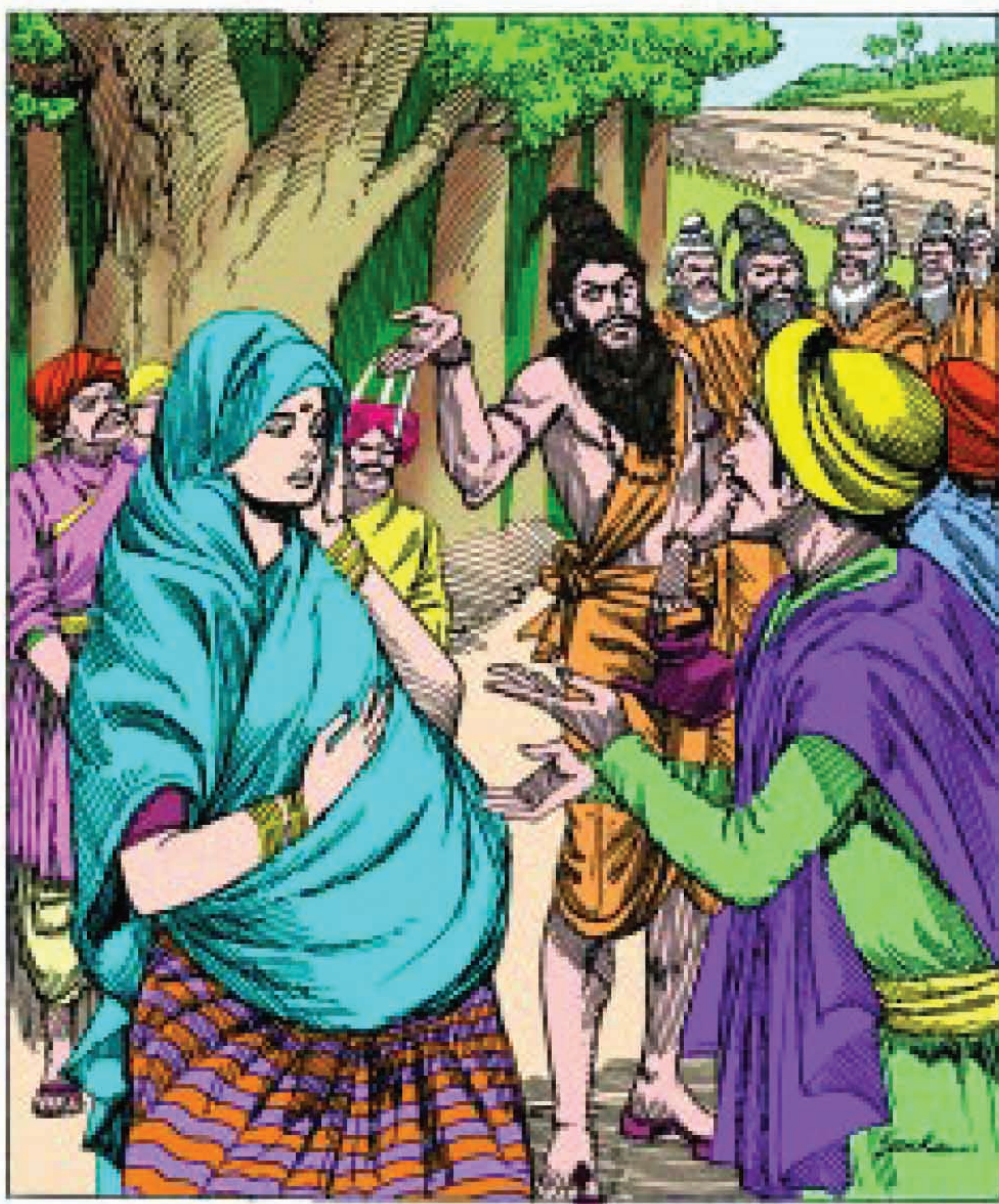
After Yudhishtira's coronation, Krishna returned to Dwaraka to manage the affairs of his kingdom. He found it in total disarray. The long absence of a leader and lack of governance had spread lawlessness and disorder everywhere.

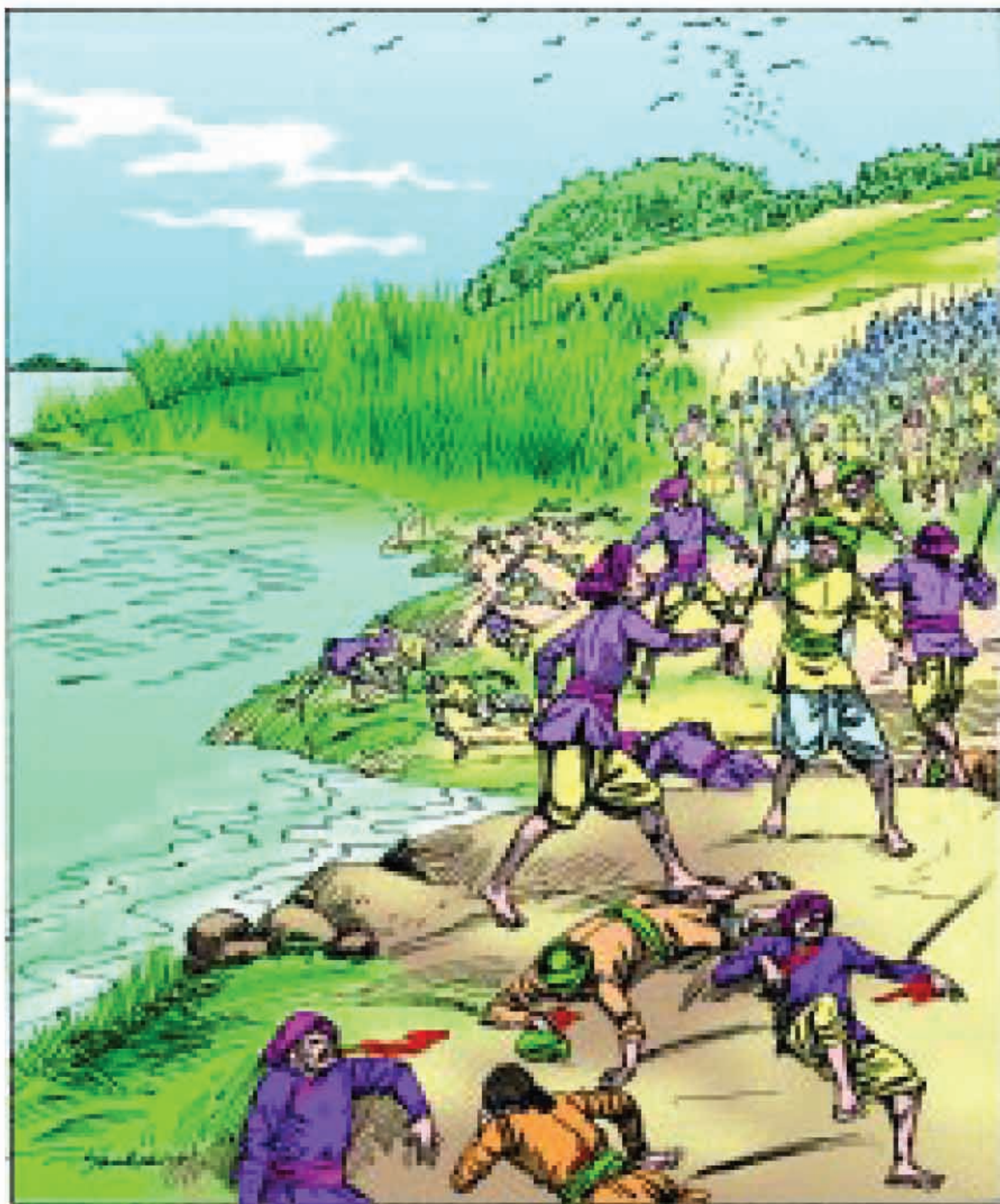
Once the arrogant and boorish Yadava youth had teased and mocked the sage Vishwamitra who had gone to Dwaraka on a visit, by dressing up one of the young men as an expectant mother and then asking the sage whether her child would be a girl or a boy. He was so furious that he cursed them saying an iron pestle would be born to the woman, and that very pestle would cause destruction to the entire clan.

When Krishna got back to Dwaraka, he heard of this incident. He had that pestle pounded into small pieces and thrown into the ocean.

However, most of the pieces got washed up on the coast of Dwaraka and grew into sharp spiky grass on the seashore. A fish ate up one of the pieces. A hunter happened to catch that fish. He took out the piece and fixed it on his arrowhead.

After some years, the Yadava clan decided to go on a picnic on the seashore. During the picnic, there was a lot of merrymaking when food and wine flowed in abundance. Many of the menfolk got drunk and

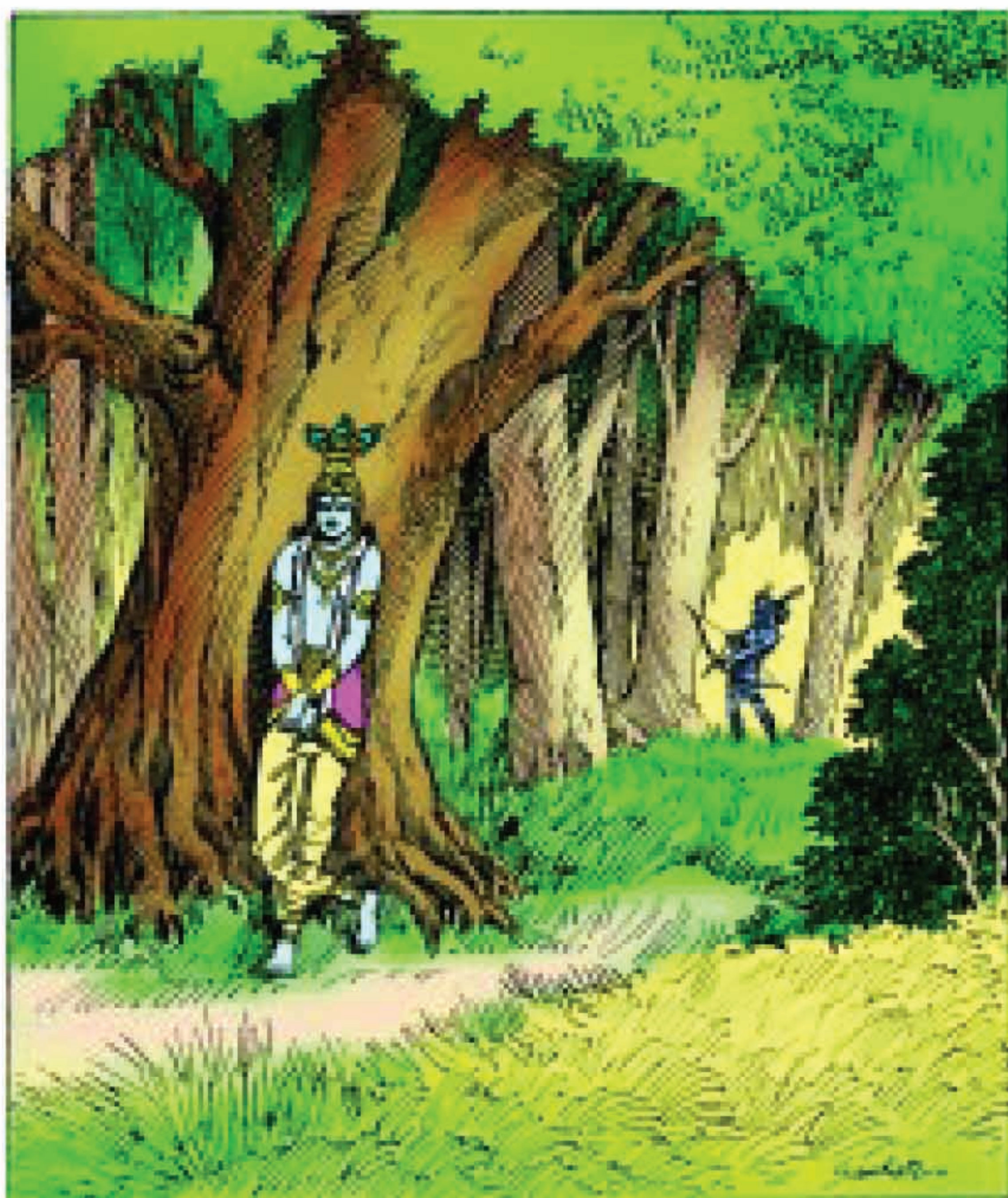




give up his body. Krishna also realized that it was time to end this avatar and he wandered down the coast playing on his flute. All of nature was charmed and soothed. Then Krishna relaxed under a tree placing one foot over his knee. A hunter mistook his foot for the horn of a deer or some prey, took aim, and set off an arrow. It was the same hunter who had caught the fish, and the arrow was the one on which he had fixed the spiky piece from the pestle that was intended to

each one started boasting his strength. This led to a big quarrel and it soon degenerated into a physical fight. During the fight the men picked up the sharp spiky grass that grew on the shore and hit each other with it. The fight became so ferocious and went completely out of control and the clan had in no time killed and destroyed each other. Thus the sage's curse as well as that of Gandhari came true.

When Balarama heard of this, he was overcome by grief and went into the forest to



destroy the Yadavas. The arrow entered the sole of Krishna's foot. This was the only vulnerable part of Krishna's body, and so as the blood flowed out so did his life force.

The hunter came by to claim his game and was horrified to see what had happened. But Krishna told him that it was not his fault and everything had happened as it was ordained. Krishna explained to the hunter that in his previous incarnation, he had killed Bali from behind a tree and this was the fruit of that action. The hunter himself was Bali's son Andgad reborn. He then revealed himself as Rama to the hunter, who then remembered his

previous birth and was taken into the bosom of Lord Vishnu with this vision.

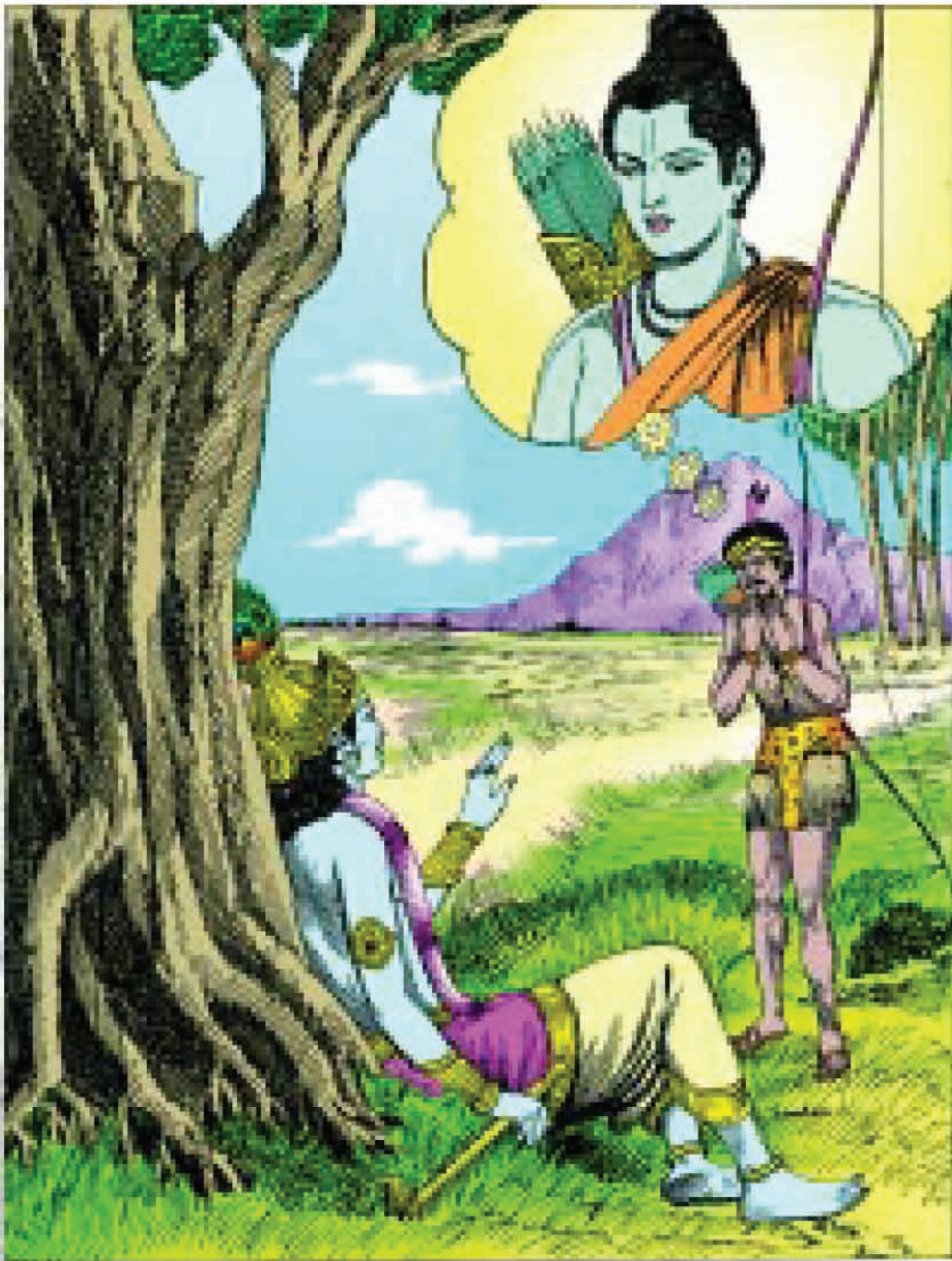
Krishna had already asked Arjuna to come and take away the women, children, and old people from Dwaraka to Hastinapur and look after them there. Now he asked the hunter to tell all those left in Dwaraka to leave and move to a safer place.

As soon as Krishna gave up his incarnation and went back to Vaikunta as Vishnu, the sea took back Dwaraka and soon there was nothing left of Krishna, his kingdom or his clan. What remained was only the faith that he had invoked in the people and the path of righteousness he had shown to the

whole world. With the death of Krishna, one age came to an end and the age of Kali or the Kali Yuga started. The new avatar of this age, according to our ancient scriptures, will be Kalki who will come riding on a horse.

The purpose of Krishna's incarnation was to punish the wicked and protect the good. Through the *Bhagavad Gita* or Divine song, He had taught us how to lead our lives well in a simple way and to repose faith in god. The *Gita*, which contains the essence of Hindu philosophy, is one of Krishna's greatest gifts to mankind.

(This serial concluded)





★ **In Fashion notes, I find frequent mention of Beauty Spots. What is the origin of the expression?**

-Smitha Verma, Bhagalpur

In the days of the Roman empire, women highlighted their facial beauty by marking dark spots - mostly round- on one side of the chin or cheek where they probably would be noticed. And noticed they were, because there are references in the poems written by Ovid and Martial. After some years, they went out of fashion. The practice of adding spots on the face was revived in the 16th century. It appears, women suffering from toothache would fix a patch of thick black velvet near their mouth. Against their fair skin, these patches also enhanced their beauty and thus came to be called beauty spots. And they appeared in different shapes and sizes — crescent moon, star, diamond, etc. They were not painted; instead, velvet cut outs were made and affixed on the face. During the days of hectic rivalry between the Tories and the Whigs in England, their supporters sported such spots on either the left cheek or the right so that anyone could easily distinguish their political leanings. When the trend spread to France, even menfolk took to wearing beauty spots!

★ **Kite-flying is a popular sport in India. Did it originate in our country?**

- K. E. Ponnusami, Coimbatore

There are evidences of kite-flying as far back as 1000 B.C. in countries in Asia, like China, Japan, Korea, and Malaya. Strangely, kites were flown mostly at night to keep away evil spirits. In China, the ninth day of the ninth month was called the Kite Day. Kites were flown across rivers to send messages. Kites are also believed to have been used for recording weather. They would carry simple instruments for this purpose. The longest kite ever used was nine miles long and was made up of a string of 10 kites, and it went up more than four miles.

★ **Why is any important day called a 'red letter' day?**

-Shivasailam, Hubli

The priests of the Christian Church, during the days when they used to prepare handwritten manuscripts, would mark certain days in their calendar with a circle in red ink to indicate Saints Days. In the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, there were 29 days thus marked in red. Days of feasts and obligations of less importance were marked with a circle in black. Present day calendars have all the Sundays and holidays printed in red. Days when some noteworthy incident or celebration takes place in the life of an individual or an organisation or institution have come to be called red letter days.

This may interest you!

St. Vincent is the patron saint of wine. But he never for once drank wine or any liquor.

A 'bath' for a parched throat!

✿ *What is the meaning of 'tonsil bath'? Does it refer to any treatment for tonsillitis? asks reader **Supriya Kakodkar** of Pune.*

Far from it! If someone had had a tonsil bath, it only means he was drinking liquor. The expression is a slang, and it means that the person drinks liquor as a habit like, say, his regular bath in water. When drinking liquor is not so much as a habit, then liquor can be described as "tongue oil" which, again, is a slang. It may mean that, if one were to take tongue oil, one might indulge in loose talk!

✿ *Reader **Lalzidingi** of Aizawal, Mizoram, has a doubt: which is correct - spoonfuls or spoonsful?*

Both are correct; they are the plural form of spoonful. Incidentally, some of the old dictionaries have the plural of brother-in-law as brothers-in-law. This has now been revised and the plural form brother-in-laws has become acceptable.

✿ *A friend told me that the expression 'office timings' is Indian English. Is it so? asks **Bhupesh Sinha** of Mayurbhanj, Orissa.*

For one thing, there is no plural form for 'timing'. The word simply means a recording of time (in an athletic event), coordinating time (of arrival in or departure from one's working place), etc. The time of arrival of a train or the time of its departure cannot be referred to as 'timings.' A better expression for 'office timings' will be 'office hours', or 'working hours'.

✿ *What is meant by the idiom "to fall between two stools"? asks **Simanta Gandhi**, a reader from Durgapur.*

When you have two options or possibilities, but hesitate to take a decision to accept one or the other or make an attempt to grab both of them, you are certain to "fall between two stools"! Not an ideal situation, eh?

Reader **P. B. Ramachandra** of Bangalore says, Chandamama “should be with us for ever”, and adds: I am eagerly awaiting the next instalment of “Devi Bhagavatham”.

➔ *After Devi Bhagavatham concludes, the story of Ganesa will be the next serial. Hope Ramachandra and other readers will find it equally interesting.*

— Editor

Reader **N. Gopal Singh** of Cuddapah writes:

The new *Chandamama* is very much admired by me. The issues will be more effective if it includes more ethical stories which help not only to promote the creativity of thinking in children but also build a better nation.

This came by e-mail from **Yogesh Suresh Mandalkar**:

Please do not make the comics modern. Keep it as it was before. Old is gold.

This came from **Narendra Sethi**, Neemuch, Madhya Pradesh:

I have been reading *Chandamama* (Hindi) since my school days. I am now 36. My family, too, likes the magazine. But ten years ago, it had more stories. Please increase the number of stories, especially Pouranic stories, which inculcate patriotism. Of course, there are many plus points in *Chandamama*, which is better than any other magazine for children.

From V. U. Nagar, Gujarat, writes reader **Ghanshyam Bhoi**:

Thanks for giving a chance to Gujarat in India's holy magazine. I am very happy about the beautiful illustrations of the folk tale from Gujarat.



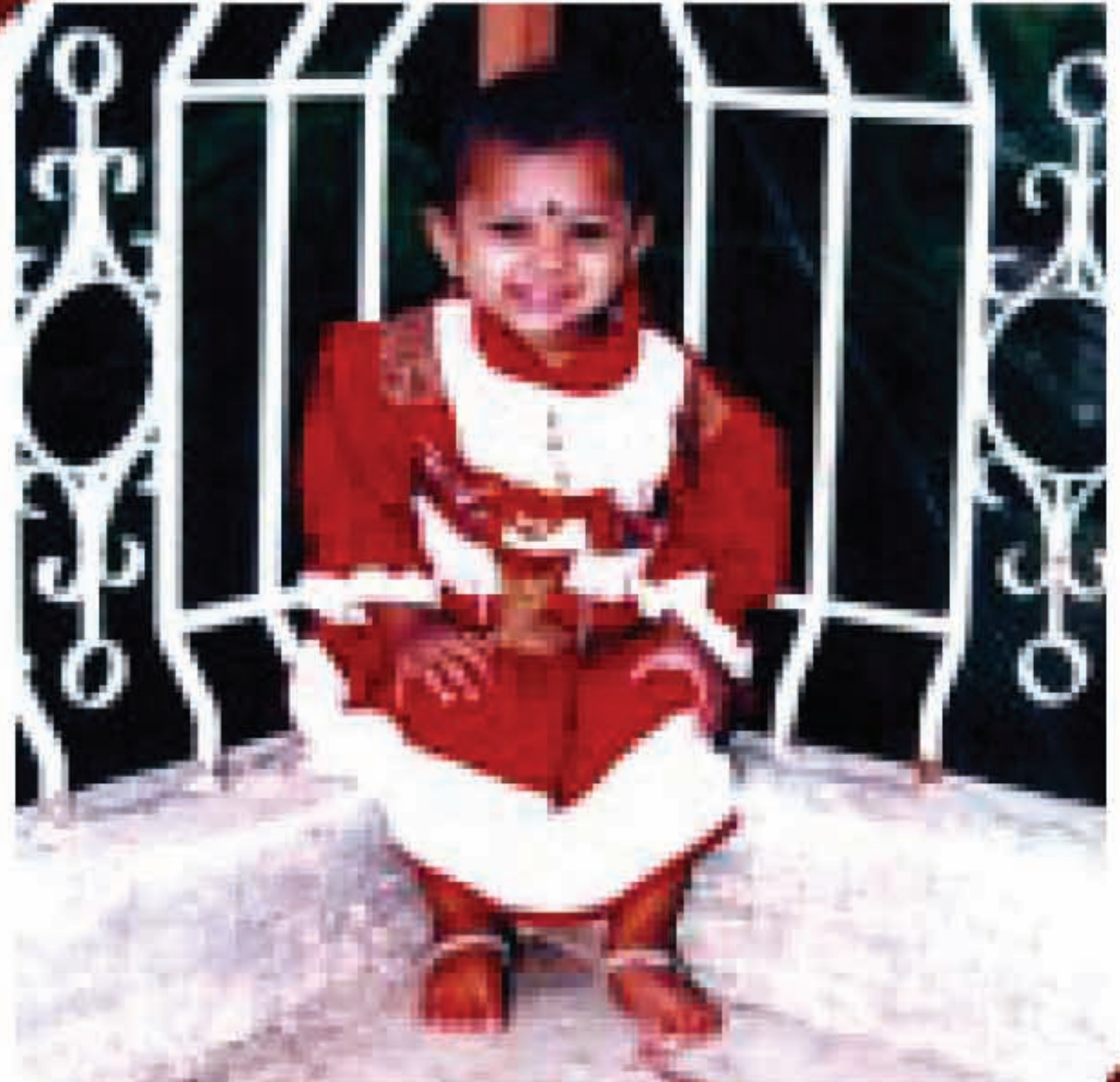
Reader **G. Poojitha** of Nandyala writes:

The stories, attractive drawings, all bring us unlimited joy. Everybody likes them. Both young and old read only *Chandamama* to pass time.



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